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The Early Life of George Eliot

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The Early Life of George Eliot

BY

MARY H. DEAKIN, M.A.

Formerly John Bright Fellow

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY

C. H. HERFORD, LITT.D.,

Professor of English Literature.

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To
Professor C. H. Herford

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

A book which is wholly occupied with the obscure preparatory years of a great writer, which closes with her first signal triumph, and ignores almost wholly the salient events of her later career, may appear to be a case of biography truncated, and truncated at the more interesting end. Yet to the student of literary origins, and especially to the reader of M. Emile Legouis's monograph on the Youth of Wordsworth, the limited aim and scope of this essay will hardly need justification. M. Legouis may be said to have established "the adolescence of genius" as a distinct study, great enough to engage the investigator's concentrated powers, and, from the standpoint of literary origins, more important than any other phase of a career. Of any comparison with M. Legouis's masterly and brilliant book there is here no question. But the writer has attempted, as a humble follower in the same path, to bring together with greater fulness than heretofore the detail of George Eliot's early life, to make more generally available the salient matter of her letters and journals, and especially to trace with their aid the successive phases of her religious and philosophical thinking. To those who recognise in the work of George Eliot a great and still unexhausted literary and ethical force, the conscientious and prolonged labour here devoted to these purposes will not appear to have been misspent

C. H. HERFORD.

THE UNIVERSITY,
MANCHESTER.
19th December, 1912.

PREFACE.

THE studies, of which the result is contained in the present volume, were begun during my tenure of the John Bright Fellowship of the University of Manchester in 1909-10. I have to thank the Council for thus enabling me to devote myself to the investigation of a subject in which I had long been interested.

My thanks are also due to Professor Tout, Chairman of the Publications Committee of the University, for valuable suggestions concerning the arrangement and presentation of the material contained in this volume; to Mr. H. M. McKechnie, Secretary to the Publications Committee, for his careful revision, by which the work has greatly benefited; finally, to Professor C. H. Herford, both for his very helpful criticism and advice during the last three years, and for the inspiring guidance in literature which it was my good fortune, as a student of the University, to enjoy.

MARY H. DEAKIN.

STOCKPORT,
20th December, 1912.

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INTRODUCTION.

In one of her earliest contributions to the *Westminster Review*[1] George Eliot writes: "We have often wished that . . . when some great or good personage dies, instead of the dreary three or five-volumed compilation of letters and diary and detail, little to the purpose, which two-thirds of the public have not the chance, nor the other third the inclination, to read, we could have a real 'life' setting forth briefly and vividly the man's inward and outward struggles, aims and achievements, so as to make clear the meaning which his experience has for his fellows."

There exist already several biographies of George Eliot, but though none of them is of the type she here deprecates, neither does any quite fulfil her requirements. They usually pass rapidly over the "struggles" and hurry on to the "achievements," giving what George Eliot would have considered undue prominence to the latter. This can scarcely be wondered at, as most of them were published in series which aim at being critical as well as biographical.

The earliest *Life*, written by Miss Mathilde Blind for the Eminent Women Series (1883) is the most sympathetic and biographical of them all, but as it was published before Mr. Cross's book it naturally contains a few inaccuracies.[2]

Mr. Oscar Browning's *Life* (Great Writers Series, 1890) and Sir Leslie Stephen's[3] (English Men of Letters, 1902) are both devoted largely to criticism, as is *A Critical Study of George Eliot's Life, Writings and Philosophy*, by G. W. Cooke (1883).

Of course the *Life of George Eliot* by Mr. J. W. Cross (1885) is of an entirely different character, and being composed chiefly of her own letters contains practically no criticism, but, as M. Scherer says, "In these three volumes we must look rather for the materials of a book still to be written than for the book itself."[4]

The latest seemingly biographical work, *The True Story of George Eliot in Relation to Adam Bede* (1905), by the Rev.

[1] Essay on Carlyle's *Life of Sterling*, *West. Rev.*, Jan., 1852.

[2] A new edition of this biography was published in Boston, America, in 1904. Most of the inaccuracies are there corrected, and besides other matter, a useful bibliography is appended. Mr. Browning's *Life* is the only English one which is similarly enriched.

[3] Sir Leslie Stephen's book is a valuable one as regards criticism, but he is sympathetic only with the intellectual side of her nature; where she approaches poetry he is less satisfactory.

[4] *Essays on English Literature*, p. 222 (translated by Prof. Saintsbury).

W. Mottram (a relative of hers), deals principally with George Eliot's family and acquaintances.

All these biographies, not excluding that of Mr. Cross, pass quickly over her youth and on to the years of her success. Yet it is just in the years of development that the chief interest of almost every person's life lies. Since the publication of Professor Legouis's *La Jeunesse de Wordsworth* in 1896 we have recognised more and more fully the importance of those years, and books similar in kind have appeared on, *e.g.*, Wesley, Carlyle, Dickens and Shelley.

While the youthful experiences of a writer are unknown or imperfectly understood, we cannot hope to appreciate justly either his mature work or himself. Many readers of George Eliot's works look on her as a woman of strong, massive, independent nature, and are entirely unfamiliar with the loneliness and pain of the long years in which she lay "inert and suffering," craving for support and encouragement, and fearing that no meaning and no good would ever grow out of her life. No striking new theory is here put forward, and few fresh details are added. Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography* (1904) has furnished a little material that helps to a more accurate acquaintance with her editorial days, and a few letters not found in Mr. Cross's book, such as that on her contemplated marriage, quoted in Chapter VII., have contributed some slight information on subjects of varying importance. The object of this work, however, is simply to make a study of George Eliot's early life, using all possible aid to understanding it more vividly and accurately. The material is drawn from the letters she wrote then, and from those of her later letters in which she refers to her youthful aspirations and experiences;[1] from the books she read then and the books she afterwards wrote, as well as, where possible, from external sources. Her work in London, both as reviewer and essayist, has been dealt with at length, as these early writings throw much light on her development, and have not hitherto received their due meed of attention. I have tried to show how the sensitive, passionate child, with so eager a longing for love, grew into the pious, introspective maiden; how for a time her habits of life and thought numbed and cramped the artist within her, until the love of beauty, roused chiefly by poetry, forced its way to the light and grew, encouraged, perhaps, by the freer system of thought which now took the place of the Calvinistic dogmas; how through her long apprenticeship to literature hope faded and languished, until the energy of another, livelier nature suddenly revived it, the great effort was made, and the artist found her true work.

[1] Most of the letters in the present volume are taken from *The Life of George Eliot*, by J. W. Cross, 1 vol., edition N.D.

The Early Life of George Eliot

CHAPTER I.

EARLY ENVIRONMENT.

If one could reproduce the England of 1819—the year in which George Eliot was born—we should see our country at one of her important transitional stages, just recovering herself after the shock of great revelations, and preparing to make practical use of them. The bad times and high prices, resulting partly from the exhausting Napoleonic wars, partly from the selfishness of some of our rulers, form dark features in the picture of the state of the nation. The political discontent which added the more threatening colours was the result, not only of this state of affairs, but also of the excitement of the French Revolution, of the hopes then awakened in the heart of the masses, of the many political and speculative writers who had written, or were writing, remarkable awakening books, and of the disappointment with which men were beginning to perceive that the path of political progress which should lead to freedom and happiness was much longer and more difficult, and even less trustworthy, than they had recently hoped. On the other hand, the days in which religion had been merely a subject of semi or wholly sceptical controversy for the learned, and a meaningless thing—a mere lifeless charm, or less, for the ignorant—were no more. The interest in it was quickened, even its antagonists began to treat it as a serious matter which once, at least, had life in it; the work of Wesley and Whitefield had roused many teachers of religion throughout the land, and the Evangelical movement of the Anglican Church had carried the religion of feeling to the highest classes as well as to the lowest.

The most promising aspect of all, however, was in the great change which had come over our literature during the previous twenty years. The spirit of Romanticism which breathed the breath of life into the literature of Western Europe, and called into being the great German philosophers and many of the most precious of our English poets, was just in the glory and strength of early maturity. Coleridge and Wordsworth were still living, though the greater and better part of their work was done. Byron, Shelley and Keats, and many smaller poets, were giving of their best, and thousands of delighted readers were watching eagerly for each new novel of Sir Walter Scott. As George Eliot grew older she came into touch with all these forces, but in her earliest childhood they scarcely

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entered into her life even indirectly. At Bedworth, a mining village, only two or three miles off, the political feeling was strong enough, and there was much excitement about revived religion, but in her immediate neighbourhood the well-to-do farmers, and dull, plodding labourers had little sympathy with or knowledge of these things. As regards religion Mr. Evans himself was an orthodox member of the Church of England, and took his religion as unquestioningly as did Mr. Gilfil's parishioners. The Evangelical movement, which was to make such an impression on his daughter's mind, had not yet invaded the parish church at Chilvers Coton.

As for Romanticism, she can have felt little or nothing of its influence, until, by a happy chance, she made acquaintance with *Waverley*, when she was eight years old. The books at Griff were all of the eighteenth century, or even older.

All these related movements entered directly into her life with her school days at Nuneaton, though they made their way very slowly to the immediate vicinity of her home, and gave her sufficient time and opportunity to receive a deep impression of those times when "Old Leisure" still dwelt on the earth.

The life and scenery of Warwickshire in the earlier part of last century have been described by George Eliot in one of the most beautiful passages in her works,[1] a passage characteristic of that side of her nature which most readers regard as the most valuable and undying.

She describes an imaginary journey taken by a passenger on the box-seat of a stage coach about 1830, when there were still pocket boroughs, unrepealed corn laws, three-and-sixpenny letters and other evils, but also some pleasant things, since departed. "Suppose only that his journey took him through that central plain, watered at one extremity by the Avon, at the other by the Trent. As the morning silvered the meadows with their long lines of bushy willows marking the watercourses, or burnished the golden corn-ricks clustered near the long roofs of some Midland homestead, he saw the full-uddered cows driven from their pasture to the early milking. Perhaps it was the shepherd, head servant of the farm, who drove them, his sheep dog following with a heedless unofficial air as of a beadle in undress." This typical peasant slouches along, scarcely glancing at the coach, which for him belongs to the mysterious "Gover'ment," that concerns him no more than the most outlying nebula. His solar system is the parish. "He and his cows were soon left behind, and the homestead too, with its pond overhung by elder trees, its untidy kitchen garden and cone-shaped yew-tree arbour. But everywhere the bushy hedgerows wasted the land with their struggling beauty, shrouded

[1] *Felix Holt*, Introduction.

the grassy borders of the pastures with catkined hazels, and tossed their long blackberry branches on the cornfields. Perhaps they were white with May, or starred with pale pink dog-roses; perhaps the urchins were already nutting amongst them, or gathering the plenteous crabs. It was worth the journey only to see those hedgerows, the liberal homes of unmarketable beauty—of the purple-blossomed, ruby-berried nightshade, of the wild convolvulus climbing and spreading in tendrilled strength till it made a great curtain of pale-green hearts and white trumpets, of the many-tubed honeysuckle, which, in its most delicate fragrance, hid a charm more subtle and penetrating than beauty. Even if it were winter the hedgerows showed their coral, the scarlet haws, the deep crimson hips, with lingering brown leaves to make a nesting-place for the jewels of the hoar frost. Such hedgerows were often as tall as the labourers' cottages dotted along the lanes, or clustered into a small hamlet, their little dingy windows telling, like thick filmed eyes, of nothing but the darkness within."

But there were "trim, cheerful villages, too," surrounded by rich, productive land, whereon dwelt prosperous, contented farmers. "This was the district of protuberant optimists, sure that old England was the best of all possible countries, the district of clean little market towns without manufactures, of fat livings, an aristocratic clergy and low poor rates.

"But as the day wore on the scene would change; the land would begin to be blackened with coalpits, the rattle of hand-looms to be heard in hamlets and villages. Here were powerful men walking queerly with knees bent outward from squatting in the mines; here the pale, eager faces of hand-loom weavers, men and women haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week's work, hardly begun till the Wednesday." These villages were full of unrest, of political dissatisfaction and of dissent. "Here was a population not convinced that old England was as good as possible."

"In these Midland districts the traveller passed rapidly from one phase of English life to another. After looking down on a village dingy with coal dust, noisy with the shaking of looms, he might skirt a parish all of fields, high hedges, and deep-rutted lanes. After the coach had rattled over the pavement of a manufacturing town, the scene of riots and trades union meetings, it would take him in another ten minutes into a rural region, where the neighbourhood of a town was only felt in the advantage of a near market for corn, cheese and hay, and where men with a considerable banking account were accustomed to say that they never meddled with politics themselves. The busy scenes of the shuttle and the wheel, of the roaring furnace, of the shaft and the pulley, seemed to make but crowded nests in the midst of the large-spaced, slow-moving

life of homesteads and far-away cottages and oak-sheltered parks."

With all these varieties of scene and of human character did George Eliot become acquainted during the first twenty years of her life, and many and beautiful are the passages in which she pictures them.[1]

She found much to love and wonder about in the succession of green fields and lanes and the canal, and did not know of those other delights which were denied her by the absence of sea and lake and mountain. Round about Griff the ground is only broken by gentle slopes and depressions, which are scarcely noticeable when one gets an opportunity of a fairly wide view. Not only are there no hills or lakes, no wild rocky pasture fields, but there are no rivers either, and scarcely any little streams; nothing but lanes and fields and the "brown canal." Twenty-four years ago Mr. S. Parkinson, of Leeds, published a little book called *Scenes from the George Eliot Country*, in which he identifies many of the places mentioned in her books, and describes the scenes in which her childhood was passed. At that time he declared the surroundings of Griff to be still the same as when she lived there, but now the signs of change are very evident. Even before her death, as we learn from *Janet's Repentance*, Nuneaton, only two miles from her home, had grown and changed; but in 1888 Chilvers Coton, which lies between Nuneaton and Griff, was unaltered, and Griff House itself was still tenanted by her brother. Now Chilvers Coton and Nuneaton have spread until they form a continuous body of houses, and the former, instead of being the rural district we read of in *Amos Barton* under the name of Shepperton, is now a rapidly growing outskirt of Nuneaton, with a thousand or two new brick cottages and a few dozen old thatched ones. These new red houses have eaten up the picturesque thatched cottages which once stood there surrounded by green fields, and are now gradually stealing up the hill in the direction of Griff House. The fields immediately about it are indeed untouched, save for a railway connecting Nuneaton and Coventry, but the old seclusion has long been forgotten, and the character and occupation of the people have changed. It is useless to go to Coton now in the hope of realising what George Eliot's early surroundings were; they are much changed, but the spirit of the place is still further removed from that of her day. The farmers now are only a sprinkling of the worshippers in Coton Church, where formerly they and their labourers formed the bulk of the congregation. The church

[1] See particularly the description of the changeableness of such scenery in *Looking Backward*, and the charming little essay on "Old Leisure" in *Adam Bede*, chap. lii.

itself, where George Eliot was baptised, and where she worshipped until her removal to Coventry, has been altered, and even the description of it as it was after the rebuilding over which she sighed in *Amos Barton* would have to be modified to-day.

Griff House is now the home of the County Dairy School, but it is not greatly altered. It is an attractive old house, built of red brick and covered with ivy. From the front to the gate stretches a grass-plot dotted with trees, one of them a large and very ancient yew-tree, the branches of which almost touch the upper windows. Visitors are shewn a room which is supposed to have been George Eliot's study, and one which was her bedroom, but the attic is the great attraction—the attic which was a favourite resort of hers in childhood, and which became a refuge for Maggie Tulliver. Beyond the farmyard and buildings at the back of the house is a large, old-fashioned farmhouse garden, where flowers, vegetables, fruits and trees grow in friendly confusion—just the kind of garden in which Hetty Sorrel gathered red currants. The old dairy has been turned into a sitting-room and a new one has been built for the school.

Even more important than this physical environment are the characters of the members of her family. In George Eliot's case this was particularly important, as she was from the first readily impressed by those around her. This trait, remarkable in so strongly individualised a character, comes out most clearly in her religious development. The person who impressed himself most distinctly on her childish mind was her father, Robert Evans, some traits of whose character are lovingly and faithfully drawn in Adam Bede and Caleb Garth. His sterling honesty, perfect sincerity and loyalty, his simple belief in good work, done thoroughly and with a man's heart in it as the best part of religion, his scorn of bad slovenly work and the workman who took no pleasure in doing a thing well—these were the most noticeable of his good qualities. With all his strength of body and character—for he was powerful physically—Mr. Evans was a tender-hearted man, and his pride in his daughter was one of the sweetest joys of her childhood. Like Caleb Garth, he also suffered from a certain self-distrust, perhaps the result of his insufficient education. Whatever the cause, this was one of the traits which his daughter inherited, along with his love of good work and his general uprightness of character.

Many of the details of Mr. Evans' early life are of interest, as they entered into his daughter's mind so much as to be largely reproduced in *Adam Bede*. George Eliot's grandfather was a builder and carpenter at Roston Common, Norbury, in Derbyshire, where Robert, one of several sons, was born in 1773.

The son afterwards removed to Ellastone, in Staffordshire, and there followed his father's trade. Ellastone is known to us as Hayslope, and in *Adam Bede* we have a good description of the place as it was when Mr. Evans was a young man, for the story begins near the end of the eighteenth century. Like Adam, he soon showed capabilities for wider work than carpentry, and about 1799 he became agent to Mr. Francis Newdigate, and held a farm of him at Kirk Hallam, in Derbyshire. Upon the death of Sir Roger Newdigate, the Arbury estate in Warwickshire, with the hall that he had been ornamenting beautifully, as Sir Christopher Cheverel did Cheverel Manor in *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*, passed to Mr. Francis for his life, and when the latter went there in 1806 he took Mr. Evans with him as agent.

Mr. Newdigate had a son, Colonel Newdigate, of Astley Castle (a mile or two from Arbury), between whom and Mr. Evans there was a warm friendship, very like that between Arthur and Adam, only that it was not spoiled by a tragedy like that of Hetty Sorrel. Mr. Evans was an excellent business man, thoroughly versed in all matters relating to land, and was also particularly accurate in valuing woods. He soon became agent to several important landowners. George Eliot loved him and was proud of him, and when, after the publication of *Adam Bede*, someone wrote of her as a "self-educated farmer's daughter," she felt herself called on to do him justice. In a letter to her friend, Mr. Bray, she wrote: "My father did not raise himself from being an artisan to be a farmer; he raised himself from being an artisan to be a man whose extensive knowledge in very varied practical departments made his services valued through several counties. He had large knowledge of building, of mines, of plantations, of various branches of valuation and measurement—of all that is essential to the management of large estates. He was held by those competent to judge as unique amongst land agents for his manifold knowledge and experience, which enabled him to save the special fees usually paid by landowners for special opinions on the different questions incident to the proprietorship of land. So far as I am personally concerned, I should not write a stroke to prevent anyone, in the zeal of antithetic eloquence, from calling me a tinker's daughter; but if my father is to be mentioned at all, if he is to be identified with an imaginary character, my piety towards his memory calls on me to point out to those who are supposed to speak with information what he really achieved in life."[1]

Mr. Evans had married in 1801. Two children were born of

[1] Cross, p. 6. For a further description of George Eliot's father see *Looking Backward* (*Theophrastus Such*), in which her deep respect and warm love for him are very evident

this marriage, but they no longer formed part of the family circle when George Eliot began to notice her surroundings.

In 1809 Mrs. Evans died, and in 1813 Mr. Evans married Christiana Pearson, a woman of rather higher social position than himself. A daughter, Christiana, was born to them in 1814, two years later, a son, Isaac, and in 1819 their youngest child, Mary Ann, or Marian, as she preferred to be called.

The second Mrs. Evans was a woman of strong character and striking personality. As Adam Bede and Caleb Garth owe many of their most distinctive traits to Mr. Evans, so Mrs. Hackit and Mrs. Poyser are much indebted to George Eliot's mother. She was a pale, thin woman, not very strong, but of marvellous energy; shrewd, practical, not sentimental, but very affectionate and warm-hearted. She had the gift of epigrammatic speech which has made Mrs. Poyser immortal, and which was shared, though to a much smaller extent, by Mrs. Hackit. Her kindness was not limited to her family; it was felt by many a neighbour in distress, especially by Mr. and Mrs. Gwyther, whose sad fortunes suggested the story of *Amos Barton*.[1]

As George Eliot received from her father a delight in good work, a love of justice and straightforwardness, and a certain troublesome self-distrust, so she received from her mother a faculty of humour, a love of orderliness in habits and surroundings, and a practical mind; from both came stores of energy and kindliness. The family was a very happy one, the tenderness of the parents being met by grateful love from the children.

The eldest of the children at home, Christiana, was a gentle, neat little girl, rather prim and dainty, fonder of sitting sewing by her mother than of exploring the country and poking about the farm with her younger brother and sister. Like Lucy Deane, she was a great favourite with her aunts, because she always behaved so prettily.

Marian was not nearly so satisfactory to them. Besides being a queer-looking little creature, with features much too strongly marked to be called pretty, she was less demure than Chrissey, had fits of passion, too, it seems, and much preferred playing with Isaac, or talking to the farm hands, to sitting still with her needlework. But though they were so unlike, the two sisters were very fond of each other, and when Christiana died in 1859 George Eliot wrote: "Chrissey's death has taken from

[1] It is generally supposed that Mrs. Evans' family provided the prototypes of the Dodsons, as there were three married sisters living near Griff. Mrs. Evans, however, is entirely unlike the Dodson type; certainly she was as different as could well be from the placid, amiable, stupid Mrs. Tulliver. Some of the elderly people still living in the neighbourhood cite other originals, and the grave of a Mrs. Hubbard, in Corley Churchyard (about six miles from Griff) is pointed out as the last resting-place of the Dodson who "liked spots."

me the possibility of many things towards which I looked with some hope and yearning in the future. I had a very special feeling towards her, stronger than any third person would think likely."[1] "The relations between the sisters," says Mr. Cross, "was somewhat like that described as existing between Dorothea and Celia in *Middlemarch*—no intellectual affinity, but a strong family affection. In fact, my wife told me, that although Celia was not in any sense a portrait of her sister, she 'had Chrissey continually in mind' in delineating Celia's character."[2]

As for Isaac, he seems to have been a fair specimen of the British schoolboy, fond of sport, straightforward, manly, with a sufficient sense of his own importance and a mind not capable of sharing his sister's thoughts and hopes, but treating her with good-natured, protecting superiority. As he grew up, he devoted himself to his father's business, in which he succeeded him, and settled down in Griff House. A portrait of him, taken in old age, shows a sensible face, the strong features of which bear a distinct resemblance to his sister's, though not bowed down with a weight of gravity as hers were, nor moulded into the same lines by intense thought, sympathy and tenderness.

[1] Cross, p. 267. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

CHAPTER II.

INFANCY, 1819—1824.

George Eliot was born at Arbury Farm on November 22nd, 1819, and named "Mary Ann" that same day.

Arbury Farm, or South Farm as it is more often called, is situated on Arbury estate, about half-a-mile from Griff Lodge, and a little to the left of the road. Near it now stands the only memorial of George Eliot which is to be seen in her native place, and this was erected, not by the public, but by the present owner of Arbury,[1] Mr. F. A. Newdigate-Newdegate, M.P. It is a substantial, austerely simple monument in rough, gray stone, merely recording the dates and places of her birth and death, with the words "Lest we forget." Mr. Evans took his little daughter to Chilvers Coton Church to be baptised when she was but a week old, so that her acquaintance with the "Shepperton Church" began as early as possible. It is fitting that here, too, on entering the building, we should be reminded of the greatest among all those who have worshipped there. On the wall of the porch is a brass tablet informing us that the peal of bells was recast and completed in 1909, and that the tenor bell was hung in memory of "George Eliot (Mary Anne Evans) born in this parish." When Marian was four months old, the family removed to Griff House, in the same parish, where she lived during the long years from infancy to womanhood. It was a delightful place to grow up in, and over and above the charms of the house, farm, garden, and fields, there was the high road just in front of the gate, where she and her brother stood and watched the mail-coach pass twice a day. They were very fond of each other, as fond as Tom and Maggie Tulliver, and showed their affection in much the same way. Of course, one must not take the earlier chapters of *The Mill on the Floss* for pure autobiography, but we know that in spirit they were largely founded on the actual experience of Marian's childish days, though the incidents do not all represent actual events. The passionate love of Maggie for her brother, however, is not an invention. George Eliot "showed from her earliest years the trait that was most marked in her all through life, namely, the absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her and to whom she should be all in all,"[2] and this wealth of childish love was first of all

[1] The memorial is not a public one in any sense, for the road through Arbury estate is a private one.

[2] Cross, p. 8.

lavished on her brother, an unsentimental young Briton three years older than herself. Many years after, George Eliot made a shrine of verse for the memory of this sweet young love. In the sonnets *Brother and Sister*[1] she recalls with warm affection those happy days when they wandered together about the fields or fished in the canal, when a kind word from him made her glad.

> "He was the elder and a little man
> Of forty inches, bound to show no dread,
> And I the girl, that puppy-like now ran,
> Now lagged behind my brother's longer tread.
> I held him wise, and when he talked to me
> Of snakes and birds and which God loved the best,
> I thought his knowledge marked the boundary
> Where men grew blind, though angels knew the rest.
> If he said 'Hush!' I tried to hold my breath;
> Wherever he said 'Come!' I stepped in faith."

He was a very careful brother; he plucked the fruit that was too high for her, and found out the best stones for her foot when crossing the stream, and he would remember—

> "This thing I like my sister may not do,
> For she is little and I must be kind."

She repaid him with absorbing devotion, caring for nothing that did not affect him. When he came, down would go any of the girlish playthings he despised, and she would gladly engage in a game of marbles, or even sit still and watch him spin his top. The sonnets give us glimpses of the dearly-loved haunts, especially along the path between their home and the canal. There was

> "a tiny rivulet,
> Deep hid by tangled blue forget-me-nots,"

and a copse where they heard the rustle of small wild creatures, a place made somewhat fearsome by the occasional sojourning of gypsies. By the path there were tall, waving grasses and flowers that

> "with upturned faces gazing, drew
> My wonder downward, seeming all to speak
> With eyes of souls that dumbly heard and knew."

The two children often took this path when they went on their frequent fishing excursions, and several of the poems are taken up with descriptions of these little holidays. They set off with rod and line and basketful of dainties "baked for us only," which the little girl is not at all inclined to treat as an unnecessary accompaniment.

[1] *Brother and Sister Sonnets*, by Marian Lewes. Privately printed, 1869. This is the only time she adopted the name Lewes in print. The only occasions on which she used her own name in print were on this book, and in the translation of Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christentums*, referred to in page 81, where "Marian Evans" appears.

"Our mother bade us keep the trodden ways,
Stroked down my tippet, set my brother's frill,
Then with the benediction of her gaze
Clung to us lessening, and pursued us still
Across the homestead to the rookery elms,
Whose tall old trunks had each a grassy mound,
So rich for us, we counted them as realms
With varied products; here were earth-nuts found,
And here the lady-fingers in deep shade;
Here, sloping toward the Moat the rushes grew,
The large to split for pith, the small to braid,
While over all the dark rooks cawing flew,
And made a happy, strange solemnity,
A deep-toned chant from life unknown to me."

She drank in eagerly the many beauties of tree and flower and stream, as she trotted after her brother with wide open eyes, her childish mind full of wondering awe at the mystery and variety of living things.

"Those hours were seed to all my after good;
My infant gladness, through eye, ear and touch,
Took easily as warmth a various food
To nourish the sweet skill of loving much."

For the passionate little soul, with its great capacity for love, there could have been no better home; all these calm beauties soothed as well as strengthened her, and gave exercise and food to her developing mind. There is no doubt that the sweet, sunny calm of these early days and places has much to do with the quiet, reposeful strength which characterises so much of her work.

There was opportunity, too, for fancy to reach out far beyond these pleasant scenes, or at least to feel that there *was* a great "beyond." As she sat in dreamy peace by the brown canal she watched the barges—

"Rounding a grassy hill to me sublime,
With some Unknown beyond it, whither flew
The parting cuckoo toward a fresh spring-time.
The wide-arched bridge, the scented elder-flowers,
The wondrous watery rings that died too soon,
The echoes of the quarry, the still hours
With white robe sweeping on the shadeless noon,
Were but my growing self, are part of me,
My present Past, my root of piety."

One incident of these early days made a great impression on her. It is recorded in *The Mill on the Floss*, and again in these sonnets. One day Isaac honoured his sister by leaving her in charge of the line while he went for bait, telling her to look out for barges and to snatch in the line if one approached.

"Proud of the task, I watched with all my might
For one whole minute, till my eyes grew wide,
Till sky and earth took on a strange new light,
And seemed a dream-world floating on some tide—
A fair pavilioned boat for me alone
Bearing me onward through the vast unknown.

"But sudden came the barge's pitch-black prow,
Nearer and angrier came my brother's cry,
And all my soul was quivering fear, when lo!
Upon the imperilled line, suspended high,
A silver perch! My guilt that won the prey,
Now turned to merit, had a guerdon rich
Of hugs and kisses."

Marian's triumph was made known to all at home, Isaac delighting in his sister's success, but she, though very happy with his praise, was puzzled. Why should she be kissed and hugged and praised for what Isaac would have considered a naughtiness had chance fallen otherwise? It was her first great problem, and the gardener's solution did not do away with the puzzle.

"'The little lass had luck,' the gardener said,
And so I learned luck was with glory wed."

But the lesson that glory was an attendant on luck instead of on goodness, though it might be a truth, was a very unsatisfactory one, and it evidently disturbed the child's sense of the fitness and justice of things.

I have lingered over these sonnets because they are the only bit of pure autobiography we possess till we come to her letters, and if they are not the noblest poetry, in the sense of being singing verses, they have many of the tender beauties that make a great part of the charm of poetry.

School parted the brother and sister, but the memory of those earliest days was dear to her to the end of her life: "firmaments of daisies" and cowslips and wild roses gained their greatest sweetness from their connection with them, and though "the dire years whose awful name is Change" had set their lives far apart, she wrote in the days of her fame:—

"But were another childhood world my share,
I would be born a little sister there."

This close companionship belonged to her early infancy, when she was between three and five years old. They were almost inseparable then, and they went together to a dame's school, kept by a Mrs. Moore, in a cottage close by Griff House. Marian did not learn to read quickly, but her brother said afterwards that that was not because she was dull, but because she liked playing so much better. She probably thought the lessons she learned from Isaac much better worth knowing than the alphabet, for "he knew all about worms and fish and those things; and what birds were mischievous, and how padlocks opened, and which way the handles of the gates were to be lifted."

But though she did not at first take readily to study, she at a very early age got the idea into her head that she would become a person of importance in the world, and in later years she told how she recollected, when she was four years old,

"playing on the piano, of which she did not know one note, in order to impress the servant with a proper notion of her acquirements and generally distinguished position."[1] This early belief in her powers is one of the special traits which give so much vitality to little Maggie Tulliver, though we see it there in a more detailed picture. At this stage Marian's sense of importance had little to encourage it except Mr. Evans's delight and amusement in the cuteness of his "little wench."

Her father was very fond of her chatter, and loved to take her with him on his drives about the neighbourhood. In this way she became acquainted with many of the characteristics and peculiarities of her neighbours, and no doubt she is recalling these early impressions when, in *Looking Backward*, she writes of her growing knowledge of the people, and how the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages stood out so distinctly from each other. That might well be, for immediately around her she would meet with a purely rustic population; two miles one way, at Nuneaton, with matter-of-fact townspeople, and at Bedworth, two miles in the opposite direction, with villagers who were mostly weavers or miners, and much given to Dissent.

Besides rambles with Isaac, drives with her father, and school hours, there was one other source of contemplation for her childish mind. Coton Church was only some fifteen minutes' walk away, and one can imagine her trotting off to church with the demure Chrissey and their wide-awake brother, stealing little glances into the hedges—just as Tommy and Marty do in *Adam Bede*—as they walked along Coventry Road, and through Griff Bottoms, afterwards to be known as "Red Deeps."[2] Who has read the description of renovated Shepperton Church in *Amos Barton* without sighing a little in sympathy with the writer because "dear, old, brown, crumbling, picturesque inefficiency is everywhere giving place to spick and span, new-painted, new-varnished efficiency?" George Eliot recalls with a fond sadness her parish church as it was in the old days "with its outer coat of rough stucco, its red-tiled roof, its heterogeneous windows patched with desultory bits of painted glass, and its little flight of steps with their wooden rail running up the outer wall, and leading to the school

[1] Cross, p. 7.

[2] "Griff Bottoms" is the name used to designate the low dip of the road between two slight hills. The left side of the road, as one comes from Nuneaton, is usually known as the "Red Deeps"—a path by the canal and smooth, sloping fields. I am sure that the other side is the true original, for here the ground is broken into "very capricious hollows and mounds" by the working of a quarry, and covered with brambles and trees—many of them firs. Here it would be just possible to see anyone from the road; on the other side impossible *not* to. Alas, they have re-opened the quarry and are cutting down the trees!

children's gallery. Then inside, what dear old quaintnesses! which I began to look at with delight, even when I was so crude a member of the congregation that my nurse found it necessary to provide for the reinforcement of my devotional patience by smuggling bread and butter into the sacred edifice."[1]

It was a sweet, healthy, happy infancy. It made a difference throughout her whole life to herself and to her books, that her childhood had been spent in pleasant country surroundings. The remembrance of those years was always there with its restful, refreshing power, a priceless possession for a nature given to great intellectual effort and strong emotion.

I have quoted much in this chapter, but I will venture to close it with the words in which she herself so beautifully recalls the sweetness of those early days and the charm that they create for their surroundings: "Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts and love of these first years would always make part of their lives. We could never have loved the earth so well if we had had no childhood in it; if it were not the earth where the same flowers came up again every spring that we used to gather with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves on the grass, the same hips and haws on the autumn hedgerows, the same redbreasts that we used to call 'God's birds,' because they did no harm to the precious crops. What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known!"[2]

[1] *Amos Barton*, chap. i. [2] *The Mill on the Floss*, chap. v.

CHAPTER III.

SCHOOL DAYS, 1824—1832.

The first great change in Marian's life came at an early age, for she was but five years old when, in consequence of her mother's frail health, Isaac was sent to school at Coventry, and she went to join her sister at Miss Lathom's boarding school at Attleborough, a small country place a mile or two from Nuneaton. The quaint little thing, with her strongly formed features and startling seriousness of expression, became a great pet among the older girls, who called her "little mamma"; but this did not prevent their thoughtless self-indulgence in crowding round the narrow fireplace on a winter evening, leaving the poor little baby of the school shivering with cold on the outside of the circle.[1]

Another painful experience of those days was the beginning of that susceptibility to terror which so often torments children, especially those with unusual gifts of imagination.[2] With her, as with Lamb, it was during early childhood—between the age of four and eight—that these nervous terrors were most agonising, but they did not then disappear for George Eliot. Like Gwendolen Harleth, she suffered from them, more or less, for many years, and she afterwards remarked that they had been "one of the supremely important influences dominating at times her future life."[3]

However, school life was not disagreeable; "she was not unhappy, except at nights," and she sometimes went home to Griff on Saturdays.

The greatest joy of all was the homecoming of Isaac at holiday times. In his old age Isaac Evans had a vivid remembrance of her delight on these occasions, and her eager questions as to all he had been doing and learning. They had a new enjoyment, too, in the acting of charades together to an

[1] The delicate health which was one of the chief troubles of her life, bringing with it headaches and nervous depressions, seems to have been partly the result of chills taken in these first years at school.

[2] R. L. Stevenson suffered it through the medium of dreams, and Charles Lamb describes it vividly in his *Witches and Other Night Fears.*

[3] Cross, p. 9. It is difficult to estimate the exact significance of this sentence; it looks rather startling, but perhaps it means no more than that those terrors spread something of their gloom over the day, and so had a determining influence on her moods and habits of thought.

admiring family audience. One can imagine the delicious sense of superiority the little sister would feel here in the exercise of her larger imagination. Then the old pleasures would be indulged in again, but with a difference. After the companionship of boys at school, that of a girl is to be borne, as every schoolboy knows, only with generous condescension, and as infancy passes into childhood, brother and sister friendships are apt to get somehow out of joint.

Another precious companionship, however, was about to unfold for her, one that would last and comfort her if that earlier friendship should fail. The difficulty of applying herself to learning to read once got over, she quickly developed a keen liking for books. Probably the first she ever read was a little volume called *The Linnet's Life*, which she kept as one of her dearest treasures, until, about the time of their marriage, she gave it to Mr. Cross. Some time before then she had written the following inscription in it:—"This little book is the first present I ever remember having received from my father. Let anyone who thinks of me with some tenderness after I am dead take care of this book for my sake. It made me very happy when I held it in my little hands, and read it over and over again, and thought the pictures beautiful, especially the one where the linnet is feeding her young."[1]

A kind-hearted old gentleman, whose name is not known, used to come to Griff House occasionally with a book for the little girl. She looked forward eagerly to these visits, for there was very little child literature in her home, and the old gentleman knew something of childish tastes. It was to him that she owed her first acquaintance with *Æsop's Fables*. This book, as she afterwards told Sir Edward Burne-Jones, "opened new worlds to her imagination." She read it over and over again with great enjoyment. It is interesting to note that she particularly delighted in the story of Mercury and the Carver. Her sense of humour developed early, partly, perhaps, owing to her mother's gift of keen wit, but also to the fact that, in the dearth of more suitable reading, she came across a Joe Miller jest book. Anyone who knows this collection of jokes would be rather startled at the idea of seeing it in the hands of a six-year-old child. It declares itself to be *A collection of the most brilliant Jests, the politest Repartees, the most elegant Bons Mots and most pleasant short stories in the English Language;* but whatever its claims to "politeness" and "elegance," one does not expect delicacy or refinement in an early eighteenth century jest book. This one is composed largely of puns and repartee, the force of the latter being often but the force of downright rudeness, and many of the jokes are exceedingly

[1] Cross, p. 10.

coarse. Some, too, would be quite meaningless to the little reader, as they depend on knowledge of real eighteenth century people, but there is a residue of really excellent jests, including some good bulls and some very witty retorts. Marian succeeded in getting a good deal of pleasure out of the book, and occasionally caused great astonishment by relating the stories for the benefit of the family. George Eliot's affection for the things of her childhood did not exclude the books she read, and in *Janet's Repentance* she speaks with evident liking of the "fine old crusted quality (of jests) to be procured only of Joe Miller." There can be little doubt that this early reading had its share in the nourishing of her wonderfully varied faculty of humour.

When she was about seven years old a great grief came to her. Some one made Isaac a present of a pony, and he grew so passionately fond of riding that he had neither time nor inclination to play much with his little sister. This was no slight and passing disappointment for her. She cared more for her brother just then than for anyone else, and his increasing carelessness of her must have meant many an hour of heart-broken sobbing in the old attic, for she was very "jealous in her affections, easily moved to smiles and tears, and proud and sensitive in the highest degree."[1] Everything seemed very dark and dreadful as she wandered about the fields alone, sadly missing his companionship, and knowing only "the strangely perspectiveless conception of life that gave the bitterness its intensity."[2]

George Eliot had a more vivid memory of her childhood and real childish feelings than most people are able to preserve, and she remembered what it is that makes the peculiar poignancy of a child's suffering: "Those bitter sorrows of childhood! when sorrow is all new and strange, when hope has not yet got wings to fly beyond the days and weeks, and the space from summer to summer seems measureless."[3] "Every one of those keen moments has left its trace and lives in us still, but such traces have blent themselves irrecoverably with the firmer texture of our youth and manhood; and so it comes that we can look on at the troubles of our children with a smiling disbelief in the reality of their pain."[4]

Yet in the calmer intervals between joy and grief she could "wander by the hedgerow and fancy it was all different, re-fashioning her little world into just what she would like it to be." "This was the form in which Maggie took her opium," and no doubt it was Marian's chief consolation too. One feels sure that Maggie's powers of imagination were a bequest and

[1] Cross, p. 8. [2] *The Mill on the Floss*, Book I., chap. vii.
[3] *Ibid.*, chap. v. [4] *Ibid.*, chap. vii.

had once been the property of an old-fashioned child who also loved her brother very dearly, and was very miserable when he did not seem to love her. But some day it should be all different, and Isaac should be kind to her and never get angry again: she had been told she was very clever, and some day she would do something wonderful, and then Isaac would be astonished and would admire her. She was sure she could do something clever, if only the chance would come. Didn't she feel that she could understand everything if people would only take her into their confidence instead of always thinking her too young to know? But some day it would all come right. She would do anything, bear anything, to please him; even hard words and looks from himself, the result of some misunderstanding brought about by her own nobility or hidden cleverness, and then suddenly the veil would be lifted, and Isaac would be dazzled by the brilliance of her character and intellect. And then he would say how sorry he was, and she, with a queenly, happy magnanimity, would pardon all his crossness, and he would never cease to admire and love her again through all their lives.

Probably in these dreams there was the dimmest forecast of the story of Tom and Maggie; when little children are in the habit of picturing for themselves deeds that shall win them praise and love there is one idea they are sure to make use of—that of saving the life of the chief person in their thoughts, and most likely some crude first study of Maggie's last brave act existed in a little girl's mind some thirty years before the world saw the finished work. Mr. Cross tells us that many incidents in the early part of *The Mill on the Floss* are based on real experiences, but so blended with fiction that it would be very misleading to take the book as true history; he appears to think it accurate, however, so far as feelings go. Miss Mathilde Blind singles out several incidents as based on fact, including the cutting off of Maggie's hair in a passion and the adventure with the gypsies. It is impossible to say how far this last incident is autobiographical; we do not know whether Marian ran off to the gypsies in a fit of outraged affection and resentment, and with the intention of being their teacher and queen, or whether she was simply found and detained by them a while with the hope of gain. The mention of them in *Brother and Sister* would rather suggest the latter.

It is certain, however, that in the case of Tom and Maggie, Marian was the cleverer child and the pet of her father, while Isaac was his mother's favourite. It is certain, also, that Marian had an intense delight in reading and that she liked to astonish people by the knowledge she got from books. This passion for books seems to have sprung into being on her first contact with Sir Walter Scott.

"Somewhere about 1827 a friendly neighbour lent *Waverley* to an elder sister of little Mary Ann Evans. It was returned before the younger child had read to the end, and in her distress at the loss of the fascinating volume she began to write out the story as far as she had read it for herself, beginning naturally where the story begins with Waverley's adventures at Tully Veolan, and continuing until the surprised elders were moved to get her the book again."[1]

George Eliot has told the story herself in the following sonnet, prefixed to Chapter LVII. of *Middlemarch*:—

"They numbered scarce eight summers when a name
Rose on their souls and stirred such motions there
As thrill the buds and shape their hidden frame
At penetration of the quickening air:
His name was told of loyal Evan Dhu,
Of quaint Bradwardine and Vich Ian Vor,
Making the little world their childhood knew
Large with a land of mountain, lake, and scaur.
And larger yet with wonder, love, belief,
Toward Walter Scott, who, living far away,
Sent them this wealth of joy and noble grief.
The book and they must part, but day by day,
In lines that thwart like portly spiders ran,
They wrote the tale, from Tully Veolan."

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The love of Scott lasted throughout her life. During her father's last years she read aloud to him in the evenings from this writer's novels, and many years after she wrote:—"No other writer would serve as a substitute for Scott, and my life at that time would have been much more difficult without him. It is a personal grief, a heart wound to me, when I hear a depreciatory or slighting word about Scott."[2] Just before her last illness she was reading some of his novels again with Mr. Cross.

But Scott's novels were not the only books Marian read. We hear of her deep interest in Defoe's *History of the Devil*, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Rasselas*, and fragments of Lamb's *Essays*. Other novels came her way also, and were eagerly devoured. During her phase of Calvinism she wrote to her friend, Miss Lewis, regretting the time she had spent in novel reading in her childhood, and speaks of the effects as "injuries inflicted on myself." Then comes this interesting passage, "When I was a little child I could not be satisfied with things around me; I was constantly living in a world of my own thoughts and was quite contented to have no companions that I might be left to my own musings and imagine scenes in which I was chief actress. Conceive what a character novels would give to these Utopias. I was early supplied with them by those who kindly sought to gratify my appetite for

[1] Miss Simcox. [2] Cross, p. 475.

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reading, and of course I made use of the materials they supplied for building my castles in the air."[1]

Yet the time spent in such reading cannot be looked on as wasted. Those stories at least gave means of exercising her growing imagination, and for a child who thinks and feels so intensely as she did, anything which supplies fresh objects of interest for the mind—unless those objects are base or basely presented—must be of value, for it helps to prevent that dwarfed and distorted condition of the imagination which is often the result of dwelling too closely within the limits of one's own narrow experience.

Stronger food was at hand, however, in the other books mentioned. It is not surprising that the *Pilgrim's Progress* should come her way and be enjoyed. Neither is it a matter for astonishment that she liked *Rasselas*. The unusualness of the scene gives the Happy Valley a fairy charm, and many a serious-minded child will find the experiences of the prince Rasselas and Nekayah most interesting, and may even be beguiled into reading the discourses on marriage and the nature of a soul. At any rate, we know that it was one of her "best-loved companions" when a child.[2] Defoe's *History of the Devil* was very absorbing. I doubt whether she ever read the early part of it, with its long discussions and wordy attacks on Milton, but the latter part provides plenty of exciting reading about witches, and the devil walking about in disguise. It was the doings of this dreaded being that most interested Maggie (and probably also Marian), especially the account of his appearance as a blacksmith, and she entered into the story with such zest that the thought of meeting the devil in his leather apron was a real fear to her when she was in a lonely lane. One feels inclined to agree with Mr. Riley[3] that it is scarcely the book for a very young girl, especially one given to fits of terror. The copy Marian read was illustrated, too, which would make the impressions much more vivid.

The chief evidence of a true taste for literature, I think, is her early admiration for Lamb, especially her relish for the essay about Captain Jackson. Many children will read almost any kind of a book if it has a story in it, but few can enjoy even the most charming of essayists, because an ordinary young child demands movement.

One other favourite must be mentioned—the dear old *Vicar of Wakefield*, the enjoyment of which was by no means spoiled by the atrocious illustrations in the copy she had. She read eagerly everything she could get hold of, often carrying books to her bedroom, and enjoying a long, quiet read by the dim

[1] Cross, p. 25. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 537.
[3] *The Mill on the Floss*, Book I., chap. iii.

light of a candle—a habit which caused her mother much vexation.

This reading spread over several years, and was probably encouraged by a change of school which was made when Marian was eight or nine years old. "At this time," says a schoolfellow, "she was a quiet, reserved girl, with strongly-lined, almost masculine features, and a profusion of light hair, worn in curls round her head."[1] The new school to which she and Chrissey were sent was at Nuneaton, and was kept by a Miss Wallington. The building still stands—a pleasant, ivy-covered place—near Nuneaton Church. There were about thirty pupils here, but Marian made no friendships with any of them; she was shy and awkward, and much more at ease with a kind, friendly teacher than with girls of her own age. Such a teacher she found in Miss Lewis, the principal governess, who took a great liking to the unusual child, and became her chief friend. Marian was a good pupil, and learned quickly and well, but the chief bond between these friends of so unequal age was that of religion. The depth and earnestness of her religious feeling was one of George Eliot's most marked characteristics. That it developed so early is probably largely due to the influence of Miss Lewis, who was an ardent evangelical Churchwoman, and found her young pupil very ready to take the impression of her views. Evangelicalism was then, as we learn from *Janet's Repentance*, just touching Nuneaton, though elsewhere its force was already abating, and the new religious ideas met with some such opposition here as in Milby, for in 1857 she wrote to Mr. Blackwood: "The story (*Janet's Repentance*), so far as regards the persecution, is a real bit in the religious history of England, that happened about eight and twenty years ago."[2] One can hardly be wrong in supposing that it happened—not in all its details, of course—in Nuneaton, when Marian was a school-girl there. It is not difficult to see how the child's heart and imagination would kindle at this bit of live drama; how the persecuted clergyman would have all her passionate, enthusiastic sympathy, and how she would straightway exalt him into a hero. For twenty years, then, this impression was kept, and often during that time she must have turned back to linger over the characters in the drama, filling in the slight outlines with her strong imagination, and thinking to herself of what must have moved this man or that to do just as he did.

[1] *George Eliot: A Critical Study of Her Life.* G. W. Cooke, p. 7.
[2] Cross, p. 224.

CHAPTER IV.

EARLY RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT, 1827—1835.

Writers on George Eliot usually speak of her nature being "religious" but do not often trouble to say what they mean by it. When I agree that she was by nature religious I mean to assert simply that her mind readily gave itself to wonder; that she looked out into unlimited time and space with awe and longing to find out and acknowledge the power beyond it all; that she found pleasure in the thought of worshipping, and needed an object which she might exalt far above herself; that the attitude of submission and obedience was one in which she found satisfaction.

In the latest stages of her religious development—regarding the change of views as a crisis, not as a break, and the whole as continuous—she found one of these tendencies, the desire to pierce the mystery of the Beyond, growing ever fainter, as the conviction that it would not be gratified became stronger, but the love and worship of humanity gave an intense satisfaction to the rest. Her religious history begins, not with the acceptance of Evangelicalism, but with those early years, in which her dim instincts were satisfied with the simple religion of the "unawakened" church, years in which she felt awe enough from the mere quietness and solemnity of church service without understanding very much of it. She had inherited a strong tendency to reverence from her father, and willingly bowed down before whatever wore the aspect of goodness or greatness. There was also the temple of nature ever about her, and there is surely something akin to religious feeling in those early moments of childhood when she sat peacefully by the canal—

> "Unknowing how the good I loved was wrought,
> Untroubled by the fear that it would cease."

—moments the recollection of which were her "root of piety."

Naturally, she had accepted the religion of her father, the religion taught at Chilvers Coton Church, without any variation save the individual colouring that a bright, thoughtful child's imagination will give to any subject. Defoe's Devil and all the wonderful and interesting personages in *The Pilgrim's Progress* were more closely associated with the world of fairies and witches than with the lessons and sermons she heard in church, or her father's teaching about honesty and truthfulness and the

necessity of doing one's duty. So, instead of receiving from Bunyan a knowledge of Puritan religion, with all its heights and depths of feeling, she carried away a picture of Mr. Greatheart as one who might be expected to appear at a time of need along with Jack the Giant-killer, or St. George, only not near her own home.[1]

Religion, as she first knew it, was a quiet, unimpassioned thing, a simple teaching of rules of life, with dimly expected rewards and punishments to be proportioned to one's actions. That this old-fashioned form of religion was really a part of her childish life is, I think, evident from the tenderness and faithfulness with which she afterwards recalled it in her stories, and from the loving care with which she describes the old church and pastors of the type of Mr. Gilfil or Mr. Irwine.

The revived religion with which she became acquainted through Miss Lewis was of a very different kind. It was, in a way, narrower, since it dwelt almost exclusively on a few doctrines—those relating to personal salvation; but it was more intense, and made a more effective appeal to the heart. Many a nine or ten years old child has felt her heart glow with enthusiasm and devotion as she has heard the story of the Cross told by an impassioned speaker, and Marian's temperament was not one to resist such an appeal. Besides, hers was a peculiarly receptive nature: she accepted gladly, and almost unquestioningly, whatever teaching came her way. This is not unusual in a child, but Marian's ready acquiescence came from a deeper source than mere childish credulity. The first definite phase of her religious development was like the after-phases in being brought about chiefly through the personal influence of some friendly and esteemed teacher, and in each case she accepted, almost implicitly for a time, the guidance and opinions of that teacher. What it was in her nature that resulted in this chameleon-like conduct will perhaps become more clear as we proceed.

Between the age of nine and thirteen we find her responding with enthusiasm to the instruction of Miss Lewis. Here was an outlet for all that ardent love and devotion which would otherwise have been repressed till they became a torment, or else wasted on some less worthy object. Evangelicalism did not plant these, its favourite virtues, in her nature; they were already there—it only fed them and encouraged their growth. Throughout her writings we notice the great importance she attaches to feeling. In this early adherence to the religion of feeling we see one of the influences which contributed to that result; in its attraction for her we see that the tendency to grasp whatever bore the mark of earnest feeling was inborn.

[1] *The Mill on the Floss*, Book I., chap. xi.

It was then much too early for her to realise that the dogmas in which she was clothing her soul would in time to come appear to her as garments of slavery, chains of bondage, though surrounded by the charm which no living being ever felt more than she—the charm of youthful memory, use, and affection. We shall see how, years later, she wrote of Evangelicalism, now with bitterness, and now with tender reverence, as one who stood apart from, though once so closely connected with, it.

One thing is very important to remember: that is, that this early religious experience was an essential part of the growth of the personality we call George Eliot. It would probably be truer to look upon that temporary wrapping of dogmatic religion rather as the sheath which encloses and protects the young leafbud while it is needed, and then, its work done, simply drops away and is no more a part of the plant, than as a passing encumbrance. The leaf-bud casts off the sheath, but as long as the cherished leaves endure, the virtue of their early protector exists in them; they would have been less strong and beautiful without that aid. Seen in the light of her later development, it appears as a sign of the practical, positive basis of George Eliot's character that she could not, even in childhood, rest content with ideas that remained quietly in the realm of thought, and had no connection with action. So we find her, sometime before she was twelve years of age, teaching in a Sunday school held in a cottage near Griff House.

In 1832 came another change of school. Marian was taken from Miss Wallington's, and sent to a school in Coventry, kept by the two Miss Franklins. She was then, says an old neighbour, "a queer, three-cornered, awkward girl, who sat in corners and shyly watched her elders."[1]

Mr. Cross suggests that the description of Maggie Tulliver at thirteen is a very fair one of her creator at this time. "A creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life and give her soul a sense of home in it."[2]

Is it surprising that such a girl should grasp eagerly at religion as the probable key to the mystery, and that the sterner and more unbending she found it, the more powerful and all-ruling it appeared in consequence? It happened that Maggie found peace for a time in the devoted study of Thomas à Kempis. in an ardent acceptance of Renunciation as the chief law of her life, while Marian at the same age sought strength in the severe doctrines of Calvinism, which she received from

[1] Blind, p. 16. [2] *The Mill on the Floss*, Book III., chap. v.

her new teachers. The Miss Franklins, we are told by a lady whose mother attended their school at the same time as Marian, "were daughters of a Baptist minister, who had preached for many years in Coventry, and who inhabited during his pastorate a house in the Chapel-yard almost exactly resembling that of Rufus Lyon in *Felix Holt*. For this venerable gentleman Miss Evans, as a schoolgirl, had a great admiration, and I, who can remember him well, can trace in Rufus Lyon himself many slight resemblances, such as the 'little legs' and the habit of walking up and down when composing. Miss Rebecca Franklin was a lady of considerable intellectual power, and remarkable for her elegance in writing and conversation, as well as for her beautiful caligraphy. In her classes for English composition, Mary Ann Evans was, from her first entering the school, far in advance of the rest; and while the themes of the other children were read, criticised, and corrected in class, hers were reserved for the private perusal and enjoyment of the teacher, who rarely found anything to correct. Her enthusiasm for music was already very strongly marked, and her music master, a much-tried man, reckoned on his hour with her as a refreshment to his wearied nerves.

"In connection with this proficiency in music, my mother recalls her sensitiveness at that time as being painfully extreme. When there were visitors, Miss Evans, as the best performer in the school, was sometimes summoned to the parlour to play for their amusement, and though suffering agonies from shyness and reluctance, she obeyed with all readiness; but on being released, my mother has often known her to rush to her room and throw herself on the floor in an agony of tears. Her schoolfellows loved her as much as they could venture to love one whom they felt to be so immeasurably superior to themselves, and she had playful nicknames for them. My mother, who was delicate, and to whom she was very kind, was dubbed by her 'Miss Equanimity.' A source of great interest to the girls, and of envy to those who lived further from home, was the weekly cart which brought Miss Evans new-laid eggs and other delightful produce of her father's farm."[1]

The Franklins' pupils received a good general education, and had capable teachers for music, French and German. Miss Rebecca Franklin was a cultured woman, "not without a certain taint of Johnsonian affectation. She laid great stress on the propriety of a precise and careful manner of speaking and reading."[2]

In Marian's home the provincial dialect was spoken, which fact would make Miss Rebecca's speech all the more impressive, a thing to be desired and imitated as connected with that

[1] *Our Times*, June, 1881, quoted in Cross, p. 13. [2] Blind, p. 16.

mysterious wealth of knowledge for which this young pupil was so thirsty. She therefore set herself to copy this feature, to speak in perfectly finished sentences, and with a low impressive voice. Naturally the immediate effect was a constrained, artificial manner and an appearance of affectation; but these wore off with the years, and the result in later life was a remarkably sweet, low-toned voice, speaking in sentences as perfectly constructed as those of her books. Everyone who attended the Priory receptions and wrote about them has mentioned the peculiar charm of her speech. Her impressive manner of reading poetry, especially her favourite Milton, was doubtless in part the result of this early care.

Whether it was because her schoolfellows did really feel her to be "immeasurably above themselves," or because she felt the difference between their minds and hers, it is certain that here, as at Nuneaton, she made no friendships. It was certainly not because she deliberately shut her heart against tender feelings, for one of those schoolfellows who admired her from afar found one day on the fly-leaf of one of Marian's books "some verses, evidently original, expressing rather sentimentally a yearning for love and sympathy."[1] It cannot be doubted that she felt very lonely through all these years of growth. The cry of the young—"Nobody understands me"—must have been painfully true in her case. None of her companions had seen her like before; they themselves were constructed quite differently. It was but another instance of a cygnet "reared uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond," and the chances were sadly against its ever finding "the living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind."[2]

Yet for all there was this lack of real sympathy, she did not choose to separate herself from her fellows. Prayer meetings were held frequently among the girls, for the school had a deeply religious tone, and in these meetings Marian soon became a leader. Miss Simcox tell us, however, that "she used to suffer much self-reproach about her coldness and inability to be carried away with the same enthusiasm as the others. At the same time nothing was further from her nature than any sceptical inclination, and she used to pounce with avidity upon any approach to argumentative theology within her reach, carrying *Paley's Evidences* up to her bedroom and devouring it as she lay upon the floor alone."

The lack of excitement which distressed her was, it seems to me, due to that positive basis of her character which I have already mentioned. She had not yet by any means sounded the depths of her nature, and was puzzled and distressed by this evidence of a perfectly balanced mind, which would insist,

[1] M. Blind, p. 18. [2] Prelude to *Middlemarch*.

like a heavily weighted club, on standing upright when she wanted it to lean in a certain direction.

Her eager reading of *Paley's Evidences* without any immediate disturbing results shows at the same time both her love of proofs of truth and the unripeness of the tendency to prove for oneself by active questioning. She was at this time far too eager to learn to throw away any knowledge that was offered her. Everything was accepted; the sifting was to come later; this was the time of harvest. Her growing nature was so large and complex that it cried incessantly for food and satisfaction; she could never stop to question whether this or that would help it more, but grasped at everything that came her way, especially at whatever seemed strong. She found the Misses Franklin very wise and good, and, with her usual longing to be taught, she gladly accepted their views of religion, which were probably (they being Baptists) more strictly Calvinistic than those of Miss Lewis. Her need of support made these stern doctrines acceptable, even beautiful, in her eyes. The inherited tendency to self-distrust, the intense longing to be a chief part in the life of someone, the quality of reverence, the favourite attitude of learner, the strong innate sympathy—all these characteristics, so inextricably blended, made her resemble a supple newly-planted young birch tree, which stands in desperate need of a prop, lest the winds and storms should destroy it, or cause it to grow up a crooked, distorted thing. This prop she found in stiff, unbending religious doctrines. Perhaps if some great and wise, large-hearted man or woman of commanding personality had been within reach she would not have made use of this aid; but she knew none such, and had to obtain her strength from supernatural sources.

During the years she spent at this school she devoted herself earnestly to whatever she considered a religious duty. Pleasures were laid aside, and her views of life became very serious and even sombre; she was ever ready to take up some charitable work, such as visiting the poor cottagers, and so well known did she become for her piety that a mother objected to send her daughter to Miss Franklin's school because "it was where that saint Mary Ann Evans had been."[1]

The Misses Franklin were very fond of their pupil, both for her unusual powers of intellect and her devotion to religious ideas and duties, and George Eliot herself was to the end of her life grateful to these ladies for their kindness to her, and for their invaluable instruction.

Apart from her religious development, the most noteworthy incident which occurred during these quiet years at school was a violent riot which she witnessed at Nuneaton on December

[1] Mrs. Cash, in Cross, p. 48.

29th, 1832. The occasion was the election for North Warwickshire after the passing of the great Reform Bill. It is mentioned here because it evidently made a great impression on her mind and lives again in part in the pages of *Felix Holt*.

Marian left school in December, 1835, and at this point there comes a pause in the change of her religious opinions. She had passed from the calm religion of her father to Evangelicalism, and thence to the sterner religion of unmodified Calvinism, but she still remained a member of the Church of England.

CHAPTER V.

HOUSEKEEPING AND STUDIES, 1836—1840.

Probably Marian's school days were brought somewhat hurriedly to an end by the rapidly failing health of Mrs. Evans. Mr. Evans, too, had a very dangerous illness at the beginning of 1836, so that Chrissey and Marian could not well have been spared from home. Mrs. Evans suffered long and severely, and though her daughters nursed her with tender and loving care, she died in the summer of this year.

The loss of her mother was an intense grief to Marian. It was not her way to take anything lightly; even the very small things of life were serious and important to her, and every experience left some distinct trace on her singularly impressionable nature. It is no doubt one of the reasons of her wonderful power in delineating character that in these early years she felt everything intensely, and thought a great deal about what she felt. The letters written in the next few years show that she was much given to introspection, and the minuteness with which she examined herself, especially as regards her moral state, might have proved fatal to so delicate a nature had it not been supported by a marvellous strength of character. All this combined to make her suffering more intense and prolonged: we find her mentioning her loss with emotion more than once in her later correspondence.

For some months the rest of the family held together, Chrissey and Marian dividing the housekeeping duties; but in the spring of 1837 the elder sister married Mr. Edward Clark, a surgeon, and went to live at Meriden, in Warwickshire.

The family was now reduced sadly, there being only Mr. Evans, Isaac and Marian left at Griff House, and when Chrissey had departed, her younger brother and sister sat down and "had a good cry together" over the loneliness of their home, so different from the home of a year ago.

The next three years were very busy ones for Marian, for she refused her father's offer to get a housekeeper, and insisted on taking the whole charge of household affairs on herself. This was a serious and heavy duty for a girl of seventeen, for it involved not only the management of an ordinary house, but the superintendence of the dairy. Nevertheless, she held on firmly, and proved an excellent manager in both departments.

She was not particularly fond of such duties, but they had come her way, and even if they had been more disagreeable, she would have had more pain in neglecting them than in performing them. In her letters to Miss Lewis we find frequent reference to her tasks: now she has "a stupid, drowsy sensation, produced by standing sentinel over damson cheese and a warm stove,"[1] and again her hand trembles as she writes, which she attributes to the boiling of currant jelly. She laments that she cannot go through her work with the proper cheerfulness "of a Christian who professes to do *all*, even the most trifling duty, as the Lord demands."

Though we are told that she took no active part in cheese-making and the like duties, she must have been fond of the dairy. The description of Mrs. Poyser's dairy could not possibly have been written by anyone in whose life these things had played no part. "It was a scene to sicken for, with a sort of calenture in hot and dusty streets—such coolness, such purity, such fresh fragrance of new-pressed cheese, of firm butter, of wooden vessels perpetually bathed in pure water; such soft colouring of red earthenware and creamy surfaces, brown wood and polished tin, grey limestone and rich orange-red rust on the iron weights and hooks and hinges." And the butter "is so pure, so sweet-scented; it is turned off the mould with such a beautiful firm surface, like marble in a pale yellow light."[2]

We get the best idea of her life at this time from the letters she wrote to her friend and past teacher, Miss Lewis. These letters are not as delightful reading as are those of some other writers; they have none of the saucy charm of those written by Jane Welsh. They are made rather monotonous by the all-pervading religious sentiment, and her strenuous earnestness rather wearies the ordinary reader, who naturally looks for lighter matter in a young girl's writing. The style is not remarkable except in great care for accurate expression, and here and there we come across a quaint stiffness of speech which reminds us of half-forgotten memoirs of religious people, such as we find in dreary-looking bindings, pushed into corners of old bookcases. There is also a tendency to be somewhat didactic on moral subjects, a tendency that remained with her to the end, though it is softened in her books by a spirit of broad toleration.

The most notable feature of her character in these years is the great predominance of religious ideas and feelings to the almost entire exclusion of purely artistic interests. Few great artists have passed through this period of life—seventeen to twenty—with their artistic instincts in such utter subjection. But few of them have had another interest in life so nearly equal in

[1] Cross, p. 36. [2] *Adam Bede*, Book I., chap. vii.

importance to their chief one as George Eliot had. Though above all things else she was an artist—I speak of the mature George Eliot here—she was also a great thinker, and philosophy, especially the philosophy of religion, claimed a large part of her mental life. In 1838 religion seems to fill her life so completely that even her love for music is crowded out. She writes that she has been to an oratorio, "the last, I think, I shall attend. . . . I am a tasteless person, but it would not cost me any regrets if the only music heard in our land were that of strict worship, nor can I think a pleasure that involves the devotion of all the time and powers of an immortal being to the acquirement of an expertness in so useless (at least in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred) an accomplishment can be quite pure and elevating in its tendency."[1]

This, however, was the lowest depth. Before the end of this short period we find her listening to the "Messiah" and being so "shaken" by it—to use a favourite word of hers—that she burst into a fit of sobbing.[2]

The following extract from a letter written to Miss Hennell in 1859 shows well the state of Marian's mind about 1837. Her aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans, to whom she was indebted for the germ of *Adam Bede*, came to visit her when she was seventeen or eighteen:—"I was then strongly under the influence of evangelical belief, and earnestly endeavouring to shape this anomalous English-Christian life of ours into some consistency with the spirit and simple verbal tenor of the New Testament. . . . I had never talked with a Wesleyan before, and we used to have little debates about Predestination, for I was then a strong Calvinist. Here her superiority came out, and I remember now, with loving admiration, one thing which at the time I disapproved; it was not strictly a consequence of her Arminian belief, and at first sight might seem opposed to it, yet it came from the spirit of love which clings to the bad logic of Arminianism. When my uncle came to fetch her, after she had been with us a fortnight or three weeks, he was speaking of a deceased minister, once greatly respected, who, from the action of trouble upon him, had taken to small tippling, though otherwise not culpable. 'But I hope the good man's in heaven for all that,' said my uncle. 'Oh, yes,' said my aunt, with a deep, inward groan of joyful conviction, 'Mr. A's in heaven, that's sure.' This was at the time an offence to my stern, ascetic, hard views—how beautiful it is to me now!"[3]

She tried hard, like Maggie, to rule all desire out of her life,

[1] Cross, p. 21.

[2] The first oratorio was at Coventry, the second at Birmingham Musical Festival. The difference in the performance had probably something to do with the difference in effect.

[3] Blind, p. 113.

but she found the "simple rule of renunciation" hard to keep. Maggie is made out of a corner of George Eliot's own nature, but it is but a corner, and that is shaped and altered. Maggie's nature, beautiful and noble as it is, is smaller and simpler than that of her creator: yet we can see much of Marian's self there, though with a narrower outlook, many experiences cut away and a few intensified: the benumbed feeling which Maggie fearfully guarded lest the "impatient thoughts" and "selfish desires" and the great, irresistible agony of discontent should come like a terrible storm upon her soul—this was not so great a feature in Marian's life. She never lost her interest in studies, especially in languages and literature, but poor Maggie is deliberately deprived of proper nourishment for these interests in order to make her loneliness more profound. Marian was certainly lonely, intensely lonely, but Mr. Evans was a pleasanter father than ruined Mr. Tulliver, and if she had no friend to whom she could confide all the struggles of her heart, Marian had at least teachers who could cultivate her mind.

"You may try," says Deronda's mother, "but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl." And to the ordinary inevitable pangs of growing genius were added, not only the disadvantage of being a girl, but the limitations of a country life with its narrow opportunities for free exchange of ideas.

Some obedience to the rule of renunciation was necessary if she was to have any peace and quiet in her soul, and she gladly renounced all the vanities of the world and many of its innocent pleasures.

She found some satisfaction in giving up all care about dress and in austerely refusing herself the pleasures of society. "I used to go about like an owl," she said, "to the great disgust of my brother, and I would have denied him what I now see to have been quite lawful amusements."[1]

The letters of 1838 are thickly sprinkled with texts, with pious longings for a Christian spirit of humility and contentment with her lot, and with laments over the periods when her soul seems for weeks benumbed and unable to enter with zest into religious emotions. She tried hard to make Christianity the very centre of her life, not "a mere addendum to my pursuits," to be tacked on "as a fringe to my garments." So she visited the sick and poor and got up clothing-clubs, simply in obedience to the commands of her Master; for, like Romola, she did not take pleasure in such acts for their own sake, she even shrank with delicate fastidiousness from the displeasing objects with which they brought her into contact. Later, she

[1] Mrs. Cash, Cross, p. 49.

realised that "philanthropy" is extolled unduly beyond other virtues, and in a review of Thoreau's *Walden* quotes with approval a passage which strongly represents this point of view.[1]

Now, however, it was part of the religion to which she was wholly devoted, and she went through what she believed to be her duty, not dreaming of giving it up because it did not happen to be really the kind of work for which she knew herself to be fitted. The Divine commands were to be obeyed unquestioningly: reason and her own affinities had nothing to do with the matter. No wonder that, in this time of self-denial and self-suppression, she felt, like Maggie, that she "was never satisfied with a little of anything." She had never tried an abundance of anything except religion.

Her extreme Calvinistic views did not please her brother. He had been to a private tutor in Birmingham, and had there imbibed strong High Church views. Marian was certain that her way was the right one, and there were many animated discussions between Isaac and herself about their different religious views. She fortified herself by much reading. Memoirs of saintly people, Church history and works on Church government, the *Lyra Apostolica* and *The Christian Year*, the *Oxford Tracts* and Isaac Taylor's *Ancient Christianity* were read, sometimes eagerly, sometimes determinedly.

The entire subjection of her artistic nature to her religion is seen in her approval of Hannah More's Letters, which she "highly enjoyed," remarking that "the contemplation of so blessed a character as hers is highly salutary." We find her begging Miss Lewis to turn to the passage in Young's *Infidel Reclaimed*, beginning "Oh, vain, vain, vain all else! eternity!" and to love it for her sake.[2] It is very difficult to love it even for her sake, and when one comes to the lines—

> "Fortune's dread frowns and fascinating smiles
> Make one promiscuous and neglected heap,
> The man beneath"—

it is hard to understand how she could seriously admire the passage. It was the word "eternity" that lighted it up and threw a charm over it for her, and as she read she attributed the ecstacy that filled her soul at the sublime idea of eternity to the lines which were associated with the word.

She came heartily to dislike Mrs. More, of whom she writes to Mrs. J. Sibree in 1848 with a harshness almost approaching intolerance: "I am glad you detest Mrs. Hannah More's letters. I like neither her letters nor her books, nor her character. She was that most disagreeable of all monsters, a blue-stocking—a monster that can only exist in a miserably false state of society,

[1] Belles Lettres, *West. Rev.*, Jan., 1856. [2] Cross, p. 20.

in which a woman with but a smattering of learning or philosophy is classed along with singing mice and card-playing pigs."[1] Young, too, suffers a merciless castigation at her hands in her article on *Worldliness and Other-worldliness*.[2]

During 1838 and the greater part of 1839 Marian mentions few books except religious ones, yet it is evident that she read many others. It was natural that, writing to one whose closest affinity to her was in religion, she should dwell chiefly on that subject. From the latter part of 1839, however, one can see evidences of her approaching release from thraldom. The religious books mentioned are scarcely fewer, but others are referred to with increasing frequency. A letter written about the end of this time (in September, 1839)[3] is noteworthy, not only as marking this change, but also as an early instance of her fondness for scientific illustrations. She writes: "I have lately led so unsettled a life, and have been so desultory in my employments, that my mind, never of the most highly organised genus, is more than usually chaotic; or rather it is like a stratum of conglomerated fragments, that shows here a jaw and rib of some ponderous quadruped, there a delicate alto-relievo of some fern-like plant, tiny shells, and mysterious nondescripts encrusted and united with some unvaried and uninteresting but useful stone. My mind presents just such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth and Milton; newspaper topics; morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, entomology and chemistry; reviews and metaphysics—all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast-thickening, everyday accession of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations." One can perceive in the setting forth of this catalogue a certain pride and delight in the variety of her studies, though it is not openly confessed. In her next letter she announces that she has been "so self-indulgent as to possess herself of Wordsworth at full length," and adds: "I never before met with so many of my own feelings expressed just as I could like them."[4]

She read with a kind of desperate eagerness, as though afraid life was not enough to learn all she would.[5] The sense of regret at the great number of noble books which she would

[1] Cross, p. 94. [2] *West. Rev.*, Jan., 1857. [3] Cross, p. 29.

[4] This recognition of the relationship between her mind and Wordsworth's was a great pleasure to her, and became fuller and clearer when she herself began to write. She saw many of the beauties that he saw, both in Nature and Man; she had the same loving appreciation for what seems commonplace to the many, and in spite of the differences in religious opinion between them, both felt the charm of some "beyond." On the publication of *Silas Marner* she remarked that she had feared there was no one who would have been interested in it now Wordsworth was dead. (Cross, p. 334.)

[5] Cross, p. 21.

not have time to read remained with her throughout life, and caused her to neglect contemporary literature because she had not time enough for that which had already been sifted. So she turns with some impatience from the poems of some "Mr. B.," declaring that as long as she can read poems like Shelley's *Cloud* she will not put up with poorer stuff.

This feeling altered a little during the period we are at present considering. In November, 1838, she had simply expressed a hunger for books which she could scarcely satisfy. In March, 1839, she deliberately excludes ordinary novels. This is a quaintly pedantic letter on the ethics of novel-reading, containing phrases worthy of Mr. Casaubon, *e.g.*, "Having cleared our way of what would otherwise have encumbered us." She allows the reading of certain standard works of fiction, but for a somewhat unusual reason—expediency!—because their contents "are matter of constant reference, and the names of their heroes and heroines briefly, and therefore conveniently, describe characters and ideas; such are *Don Quixote*, Butler's *Hudibras*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gil Blas*, Byron's *Poetical Romances*, Southey's ditto, etc. Such, too, are Walter Scott's novels and poems." But the ordinary novel is "a cup suspected poisonous" and a waste of time.[1]

By 1840 the artist was beginning to awake in her, and the craving for beauty to demand satisfying. Books were no longer valued merely for their Christian edification, or even for the knowledge they had to give. She took up the study of Italian, and then of German—reading Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, Tasso, and other works in both languages.[2]

Eager and athirst for both knowledge and beauty, if she read novels and poetry she feared she was not acquiring enough of the first, and if she set herself to severe studies the "fields of poesy" looked "more lovely than ever."[3]

She allowed herself to enjoy *Don Quixote* and *The Faerie Queene*, but she also read Mrs. Somerville's *Connection of the Physical Sciences*, and some history.

As she continued to receive lessons on the piano she must have led a very busy life, and to all this she added the preparation of a Chart of Ecclesiastical History. This had a place in her mind for over a year, but just as she saw the way clear to finishing it, one was published which she declared to be far superior in conception to her own. She relinquished her plan without much regret, for she had only grasped it as something which needed to be done and which she could probably do well, not at all as something which she longed to

[1] Cross, p. 24.

[2] Her teacher, a Mr. Brezzi, used to go regularly to Griff to give her lessons in these languages.

[3] Cross, p. 33.

do and which no one but herself could do. It was in much the same frame of mind that she took up the "duty" of translation a few years later. Now she gave up the chart contentedly, and returned to the fascinating study of languages, saying "I could e'en give myself up to making discoveries in the world of words."

She had already, however, had the satisfaction of seeing a piece of her work in print. This was a short poem which appeared in the *Christian Observer* for January, 1840, expressing the consciousness of the frailty of the ties that bind us to life in the mood of a young creature who has not yet sent his roots deep down into this earth. Each stanza says "Farewell" to some part of life—to fields, flowers, birds and the like. I quote two stanzas as characteristic of two of her strongest feelings:—

"Books, that have been to me as chests of gold,
Which, miser-like, I secretly have told,
And for them love, health, friendship, peace have sold,
Farewell!"

"Dear kindred whom the Lord to me has given,
Must the strong tie that binds us now be riven?
No! say I—only till we meet in heaven,
Farewell!"

The verses are somewhat commonplace, and would scarcely have been preserved for their own sake, but they are signed with her initials, "M. A. E."

In the beginning of 1841 Isaac married, and it was arranged that he should take over Griff House, while Mr. Evans and his daughter should go to reside near Coventry. The long companionship, once so close, lately so much loosened, thus came to an end. The interests of the brother and sister differed more widely every year, he taking an active part in his father's business, and finding his pleasures in hunting and friendly association with young men of his own kind, she caring less for the lighter pleasures of the world, and growing to love more and more the deeper happiness to be gained from reading and thinking.

Marian had probably at the time no idea whither her reading was leading her. The Oxford *Tracts for the Times* roused her indignation and alarm, for she was one of those who thought they saw in them a dangerous friendliness to Rome, "a disposition rather to fraternise with the members of a Church carrying on her brow the prophetical epithets applied by St. John to the Scarlet beast, the mystery of Iniquity, than with pious Nonconformists,"[1] and she eagerly devoured Isaac Taylor's *Ancient Christianity and the Doctrines of the Oxford Tracts for the Times.* The writers of the Oxford Tracts had

[1] Cross, p. 27.

made frequent appeal to the early fathers for support of their doctrines. Isaac Taylor made a careful examination of the writings of these men, and found that the later errors of the Roman Church had all begun to spring up in the centuries immediately succeeding the death of the Apostles; that superstition and error, and all the abuses attaching to celibacy—wilful misinterpretation of the Scriptures and conscious frauds, sham miracles, relics and the like—were all existent within that Early Church which the Tractarians referred to as well-nigh infallible. Taylor was a man of deep piety and lofty religious idealism, and had undertaken this great task, though a layman, out of love and loyalty to his religion.

Quite early in his work he warns readers against a little knowledge of the history of religion. "Christianity has absolutely no difficulties . . . excepting such as attach to its history. . . . The Christian, if he would enjoy any serenity, should either know nothing of the history of his religion, or he should be acquainted with it so profoundly as to have satisfied himself that the dark surmises which had tormented his solitary meditations have no real bearing upon the principles of his faith."[1] Taylor succeeded in so satisfying himself; his faith remained strong because it did not rest on evidences but on revelation. George Eliot's nature was different; evidences were very necessary to her, and became more and more so as she developed.

By showing how full the Early Church was of errors and faults Taylor had prepared the way for Charles Hennell's *Origin of Christianity*, which carried the dismay and doubt so roused, back into the New Testament itself. George Eliot in her later years held the *spirit* of Christianity to be the highest form of religion yet known; it was the insufficient evidence that prevented her from accepting the historical part of it as fact. And now, though probably she was scarcely aware of it, the way was prepared for doubts and questionings, and when she came to read Hennell's book she would find the walls of her faith shaken surprisingly near their foundation.

There had been a disturbing element, however, even earlier than this. When asked in later years to whose influence she attributed the first unsettlement of her orthodox views, she answered, "Oh, Walter Scott's."[2] This somewhat astonishing reply can probably be explained when we remember how catholic Scott was in his treatment of religion, and how many noble characters in his books seem to trouble very little about any church at all.

The next disturbing influence was that of Lord Lytton's *Devereux*.[3] There is a character in this book, an Italian,

[1] *Ancient Christianity*, Vol. II., p. 18. [2] Mrs. Cash, Cross, p. 48.
[3] Cross, p. 32.

named Bezoni, who did not accept the Christian faith and did not believe in the personal immortality of the soul. Yet he was noble, pure, unselfish, modest and learned; he never tried to press his opinions on another; he "lost his life attending the victims of a fearful and contagious disease," whom even the doctors hesitated to visit. The fact that so beautiful a character could exist without the aid of religion (or of Christianity, which was the same thing to her) was a great source of uneasiness to Marian, who was only thirteen when she read the book. Neither the influence of Scott nor of such characters as Bezoni, however, would have done more than incline her to widen her sympathies, if Isaac Taylor's books had not come her way. His *Physical Theory of Another Life* did its part towards unsettling her in a slightly different direction. She spoke of it afterwards as "exciting thought and leading speculation further than he would have desired."[1] Taylor, in the strength of his own faith, sees little danger in these speculations "when once religious principles have taken full possession, as well of the understanding as of the moral faculties,"[2] and walks serenely and fearlessly on, quite unconscious of the stumblings and bruises of those who follow him.

His style is calm, graceful and dignified, and many passages of his books are full of a quiet beauty and musical rhythm. No wonder that, as Marian read on, dutifully at first, then with eager delight, his words should sink into her mind, to be remembered very soon and put to a very different use from that which he had intended. So far as one can see from her letters, this preparation for a change of faith was quite unconscious, but it was none the less thorough.

Is it not a foreshadowing of what was to come that she chose as her motto, near the end of 1840, the words "Certum pete finem" ("Seek a sure end")?

[1] Mrs. Cash, Cross, p. 35. [2] *Physical Theory of Another Life*, p. 129.

CHAPTER VI.

CHANGE OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS, 1841—1842.

In *Daniel Deronda*, Book I., Chapter III., George Eliot wrote: "A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar, unmistakeable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge—a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbours, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread, not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood." George Eliot was herself just so rooted in the quiet home and fields and lanes of her childhood. It was not until she was about to remove to Foleshill that she realised how those well-known scenes had "grown into her affections." Probably even then she did not suspect how much firmer the roots would grow with the passing of time: certainly she did not dream that the surroundings of her childhood—the dairy, the garden, the church, the fields and hedges would strike their roots deep into English literature through her abiding love of them.

At this time a great part of her nature was still undeveloped, though the chief features of her character were clearly marked. The strong and rapid growth of her ethical and religious tendencies had interfered with the development of the artistic side of her nature by diverting an unproportionate amount of strength to themselves, and, partly in consequence of her devotion to a revealed religion which rests on authority and demands complete subjection, her attitude of mind had so far been too entirely receptive, lacking the proper proportion of combativeness which was necessary to the increase of her strength. The reaction towards a more generous and rational view of things had just perceptibly begun before the settlement at Foleshill, which came about in March, 1841. This did not, however, interfere with those noble traits of character which she had until now regarded as purely Christian virtues, and through all the storm and stress of mind which was soon to follow, the love of truth and justice, the admiration for worthy tasks faithfully performed, the scorn of meanness and hypocrisy, and the all-pervading passionate love and sympathy for mankind stood out high and unwavering, only growing

stronger and more humanised in the struggle. If, now and then, a word of bitterness or harshness was uttered, it was but a momentary consequence of the strife, not an indication of any actual moral harm. She was still straining desperately after the highest and best, without any very definite conviction as to what they were. It was inevitable that she should often fall back, sick and exhausted; it was inevitable, too, that she should soon raise herself and again attempt to scale the heavens.

During the first months of her life at Foleshill she is still writing to Miss Lewis, and speaks now of the pleasure with which she contemplates her new life, and her determination to be a "snapper-up of unconsidered moments," and then of her intense loneliness, her longing for a friend to whom she can pour out her soul, or at least a companion in her studies. Her health was still imperfect, but she not only continued her study of German, Italian and music, she added to these Greek and Latin.[1] The house in which she and her father lived is still standing, though much altered. It is a semi-detached house on the Foleshill Road, a few minutes' walk from Coventry.[2]

This change of residence meant a change from country to town life; it meant more books, and—what was the very thing she stood most in need of—stimulating companionship. There was a fair amount of garden round the house, and this she delighted in cultivating, trying to make it as much as possible like the old-fashioned garden at Griff. She was now sole mistress of her father's house and free to indulge certain fastidious ideas which had perhaps been kept a little in check before by dread of brotherly criticism. As the severity of her Calvinism abated she developed a liking for dainty things, a "lady-like" fastidiousness, which trait she afterwards reproduced with amused, half-satirical tolerance in Esther Lyon. "Delicate" is a favourite adjective of hers, which is to the last a reminder of this early characteristic. Probably the early opportunities of visiting such places as Arbury, and noting the refinements of the inmates and their surroundings, had done much to foster what was already "a strong natural prompting and susceptibility," while at the same time they had served to mark more definitely in her mind the differences of the various levels of society and the almost unsurpassable bars between them. Meredith has remarked in *Rhoda Fleming* that women are more democratic than men, and George Eliot was particularly so; the feeling of caste always irked her, and yet she had a feeling for the manners and surroundings of the "higher

[1] Her instructor in Classics was the Rev. T. Sheepshanks, then headmaster of Coventry Grammar School.

[2] It is now known as Bird Grove, and was until recently in the possession of the Cash family.

classes" akin to Angel Clare's[1] "lyrical and dramatic" interest in families of noble birth. Her fastidiousness was closely connected with this. Perhaps it was the early vagueness of the artist's dread of the sordid and ugly, differing from the mature artistic taste in form and not in kind, as the lower leaves of the buttercup differ from the higher.

Some valuable, momentous and lasting friendships were formed at Foleshill. Next door to her home lived Mrs. Pears, with whose brother, Mr. Charles Bray, Mr. Evans had formerly been slightly acquainted. This lady and Marian were soon on friendly terms, and Mrs. Pears took her young neighbour to visit the Brays, who kept open house in a hospitable manner resembling that of Chaucer's Frankeleyn, only what drew visitors to Rosehill was the generous mental food always to be had there rather than the material "table dormant."

This visit is probably the one which George Eliot refers to as taking place on November 2nd, 1841. Mr. Bray has left an interesting account of it. "My sister, who lived next door to her, brought her to call upon us one morning, thinking, amongst other natural reasons for introducing her, that the influence of this superior young lady of evangelical principles might be beneficial to our heretical minds. She was then about one and twenty, and I can well recollect her appearance and modest demeanour as she sat down on a low ottoman by the window, and I had a sort of surprised feeling when she first spoke, at the measured, highly-cultivated mode of expression, so different from the usual tones of young persons from the country. We became friends at once. We soon found that her mind was already turning towards greater freedom of thought in religious opinion, that she had even bought for herself Hennell's *Inquiry*, and there was much mutual interest between the author and herself in their frequent meeting at our house."[2]

The family at Rosehill consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray, and, as a frequent visitor, Miss Sara Hennell,[3] Mrs. Bray's sister. All three were ardent philosophers and philanthropists, and each exerted an influence over George Eliot.

As this friendship grew Marian seemed to find in it a great deal of pleasure and sympathetic help. To Miss Sara Hennell she could always turn for intellectual sympathy, and Mrs. Bray was ever ready with tender comfort when she was ill or in trouble; indeed, the two became as sisters to her, while Mr. Bray, besides acting as guide and philosopher, brought out the

[1] Mr. Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, chap. xxvi. "Politically, I am sceptical as to the virtue of their being old . . . but lyrically, dramatically, and even historically, I am tenderly attached to them."

[2] Charles Bray's *Autobiography*, p. 76.

[3] George Eliot did not meet Miss Hennell until the summer after the removal to Foleshill, when the great change in her opinions had already taken place.

humorous side of her nature and became for many years her greatest male friend.

All three wrote books of some importance. Mr. Bray, though in business as a ribbon manufacturer, had been interested from boyhood in religious and metaphysical problems, and had already written his *Education of the Feelings*. He had a strong, independent mind, and was a professed Freethinker. In early manhood he had been much troubled by his inability to reconcile the Christian creed with his own needs and convictions; he felt that there was a grave misunderstanding about the "end of man" and kindred subjects. His first definite advance to freedom came about on his reading Edward's *Inquiry into Freedom of Will*. This convinced him of the truth of the theory that man must always act in accordance with his character and circumstances; that, given the organisation with which he began life and the particular circumstances which acted on it, a man could at no moment of his life have acted differently than he did. So he was led to the conclusion that "mind is equally the subject of fixed law with matter." Mr. Bray was a Pantheist, but he formulated a theory of his own about the ordering of the Universe—that it was originally managed by an intelligent will, but that as we come to do automatically what we once did deliberately, so the management of the Universe has become an unconscious, involuntary process.

In many respects his philosophy resembles that of Schopenhauer, but Bray was perfectly cheerful, and could not be called a pessimist.[1]

He was a strong moralist and full of benevolence, believing that if men only thoroughly understood that they were governed by fixed laws and realised how limited was the blame that one could fairly give to another, an increase of kindly feeling would be the immediate consequence. With the object of teaching this he wrote his *Philosophy of Necessity*, on which he was engaged when he first met George Eliot in 1841.

The book is earnest, and sensibly and clearly written. There is no aiming at effect for its own sake, no rhetoric, no eager bid for literary notoriety. Mr. Bray wrote not for the gratification of self-love, nor out of an abstract regard for truth, but from a deeply-felt wish to do good to his fellow-beings and a conviction that this truth, which so many failed to recognise and others laid ignorantly or timorously aside as being of no practical value, was the best gift in his power to offer. He was a firm believer in phrenology, then attracting great attention, one of its chief exponents being George Combe. Mr. Bray was also interested in the social schemes of Robert Owen and took

[1] See article "Illusion and Delusion; the Writings of Charles Bray." *West. Rev.*, April, 1879.

part in the attempt to form a community at Queenwood. This failing, he applied himself to more ordinary methods of philanthropy, chiefly to attempts to better the condition of the working classes.

His wife was a woman of noble and sweet character, full of tenderness for every living, suffering thing. She shared her husband's opinions and his feeling of general goodwill to men. Her written work, however, was of a different character, being chiefly little books intended to improve the mental and moral nature of children. She was one of the earliest and most earnest workers among those who taught kindness to the brute creation, and her *Duty to Animals* was for many years a text-book in Midland schools. The beauty of her nature was one of the strongest evidences to Marian that goodness was not dependent on any particular form of faith. The third member of this attractive group, Miss Sara Hennell, became, from the summer of 1842, the constant companion of George Eliot whenever circumstances permitted it. She shared the hopes and fears and keen aspirations that animated the mind of her young friend, and Marian could always be sure of someone who was able to understand her, and think and feel with her—a luxury she had never enjoyed before.

Miss Hennell was "high-strung, nervous, excitable, importing all the ardour of feeling into a life of austere thought."[1] Her books show a strenuous, grave nature, deeply imbued with religious feeling. In what is probably her best work, *Thoughts in Aid of Faith*, she grapples fearlessly with religious difficulties. Having put aside the Christ of the Bible for the Jesus of history, she searches psychology, ethics and philosophy for their bearing on the matter, and ends by looking forward to the unknown in brave faith, sure, in her lofty theism, that the power that rules the universe is good.

Through this remarkable group of friends George Eliot became acquainted with a book, the reading of which formed the turning-point of her religious life.[2] When Mr. Bray married Caroline Hennell, her brother, Mr. Charles C. Hennell, who had been brought up a Unitarian, undertook to make a thorough investigation of the evidences of Christianity in the hope of strengthening his own faith and converting Mr. Bray, who was already a thorough sceptic. The result, however, was not what he anticipated. Beginning without the usual training in orthodox Christian dogma, and also without any philosophical prejudices, he carried on an independent examination with a more than usually open mind. Up to this time such works had usually been executed, in England at least, with a

[1] Blind, p. 27.

[2] She had bought the book before meeting the Brays, but evidently hesitated to read it.

certain rancour of spirit which hindered their acceptance by those not already convinced. Hennell's *Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* was one of the first which seemed to result from a pure love of truth, and to be the outcome of a perfectly unbiassed examination. He begins by an attempt to prove that the rise and growth of Christianity may be explained by purely natural causes; then he examines the Evangelical writers and decides that their claims on our credence are not sufficient to sustain the miraculous part of their narrative. This is followed by a careful examination of the miracles in the Gospels and Acts, especially the Resurrection and Ascension, and a comparison between the Gospels and the Apostolic Epistles, to determine how far the latter confirm the miraculous elements. Next comes a painstaking consideration of the prophecies said to concern the Messiah—how far they are fulfilled in Jesus; and, finally, a study of the character, views and doctrines of Christ. The thought of a specially divine nature is entirely given up. Hennell sees in Jesus only an enthusiast, a revolutionist, a reformer, a moral and religious teacher.

Dr. Strauss, whose *Leben Jesu* had appeared a few years before, was so greatly impressed with the work of Hennell that it was translated into German through his instrumentality. In the preface which Strauss wrote to it he says: "Not sufficiently acquainted with German to read continuously a learned work in that language, the labours of our theologians were only accessible to him so far as they were written in Latin, or translated into English, or treated of in English writings or periodicals. . . . Only so much the more remarkable is it, however, that both in the principles and in the main results of his investigation, he is on the very track which has been entered on amongst us in recent years. . . . The subject is treated in the earnest and dignified tone of the truth-seeker, not with the rancour of a passionate polemic. We nowhere find him deriving religion from priestcraft, but from the tendencies and wants of human nature. . . . These elevated views, which the learned German of our day appropriates as the fruit of the religious and scientific advancement of his nation, this Englishman, to whom most of the means at our command were wanting, has been able to educe entirely from himself. . . . An Englishman, a merchant, a man of the world, he possesses, both by nature and by training, the practical insight, the sure tact, which lays hold on realities. The solution of problems over which the German flutters with many circuits of learned formulæ, our English author often succeeds in seizing at one spring."

Miss Blind informs us that Marian determined to read the Bible through before beginning the perusal of Hennell's book.

Occasionally Miss Blind errs, which is not strange when we remember that Mr. Cross's *Life* was not published when she wrote, but this story agrees so well with Marian's earnest thoroughness that one feels inclined to accept it. The letters to Miss Lewis contain no word of doubt and turmoil till November 13th. The truth is probably that, hearing from Mrs. Pears and others of this wonderful book, she longed to read it, and bought it, but, knowing her own proneness to take for her own the opinions of any decided person whom she could admire, and shrinking with timid pain from the risk of losing the old faith which had been the centre of her life and affections for many years, she resolved to fortify herself by re-reading the Scriptures.

If she began the reading of the Bible she probably had not finished it when that momentous visit to the Brays occurred. Then she could wait no longer. Perhaps it was the charm of Mrs. Bray's character which roused again the old wonder that a man or woman could deny every article of Christian faith and yet be good and noble. At any rate, without further delay, she plunged into the *Inquiry* and read with intense interest. The visit probably occurred on November 2nd. On November 13th she wrote to Miss Lewis in a strain which must have caused her late governess some anxiety: "My whole soul has been engrossed in the most interesting of all enquiries for the past few days, and to what results my thoughts may lead I know not—possibly to one that will startle you; but my only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error. . . . What a pity that while mathematics are indubitable, immutable, and no one doubts the properties of a triangle or a circle, doctrines infinitely important to men are buried in a charnel-heap of bones over which nothing is heard but the barks and growls of contention."[1] Unfortunately, no letters exist written at this date which throw any light on the crisis through which she was passing. The very next letter which refers to the matter at all is dated January, 1842, and speaks of the family difficulties which had arisen from her final rejection of orthodox Christianity. So, then, in two months or less the metamorphosis was completed, and she had changed from an apparently devout Christian to a "free-thinker." But, as we have seen, the change was in reality much less sudden than it appeared to her friends.[2]

I have said that the preparation of her mind was thorough. It was also definite. Isaac Taylor had built his argument on a careful and circumstantial proof that the early fathers of the

[1] Cross, p. 46.

[2] Lord Acton says that "from Jonathan Edwards to Spinoza she went over at one step." *Nineteenth Century*, March, 1885. She but stepped across a line which she had been approaching for years.

Christian Church were unworthy of confidence. Charles Hennell pursued the same line of thought and carried it a step onward. The fathers were guilty of subterfuge and perversion of the Scriptures, perhaps with pious intention; but still the fact remained that one could not accept as certain truth all they said. And if they were unreliable, why not the generations immediately preceding them? What guarantee was there that the Gospels were not themselves blighted with the same inaccuracy—that Matthew had not strained the Old Testament prophecies to make them fit Jesus, that the Evangelists had not related of the life of their Master, not simply what he did and said, but what was fitting for him to do and say?

It was but a step from Taylor to Hennell, and that was soon taken. Hennell's book has now, of course, been replaced by much more scholarly works. He built some arguments on foundations which are no longer accepted by scholars, some, indeed, on foundations of doubtful security even then, but his methods are those still used in scientific enquiry, and these methods appealed to George Eliot all the more because she had recently been reading scientific works, such as Mrs. Somerville's *Connection of the Physical Sciences* and Nichol's *Architecture of the Heavens and Phenomena of the Solar System.* It was a new delight to her to find that scientific methods could be carried into the examination of religion.

The reading of the *Inquiry* was not the only important influence on her decision. Her girlish mind had been disturbed by the perception that people could be "good" without being devoted to the Christian religion. Now she had also the opportunity of contemplating living people who refused to call themselves Christians, yet were possessed of the finest moral qualities and much charm of character. Her subsequent experience had shewn her what troubled her still more—that strong professions of faith could exist with mean, even immoral lives. She wondered that educated people who called themselves Christians could indulge in frivolous and even ill-natured conversation without any sense of its incongruity with their profession. Miss Sibree (Mrs. John Cash) tells "how shocked she (Marian) had been by the apparent union of religious feeling with a low sense of morality among the people in the district she visited, who were mostly Methodists. She gave as an instance the case of a woman who, when a falsehood was clearly brought home to her by her visitors, said, 'She did not feel that she had grieved the spirit much.'"[1]

Gradually the ties that bound goodness and the religion of her childhood became loosened, and she was forced to realise that the two were distinct and independent of each other.

[1] Cross, p. 47.

These two factors—her reading and experience of religious and other characters—might have been much longer in bringing her to the point of decision had it not been for a third factor—personal influence. One may read and hesitate long before venturing on such a step. Arguments are wonderfully reinforced when we hear instead of merely reading them. New theories of life make a much greater impression on us when we meet people who hold them and live by them than when we see them in a book. The Brays not only held advanced opinions; their lives and conversation were shaped by them. It is not surprising that the views of the persons we most admire and love should make a deep impression on us, and cause us to regard those views at the very least with tolerance and interest. With George Eliot it was always more, at any rate in her youth; to the tolerance and interest which others feel she added sympathetic inclination, which was restrained but not annihilated by her love of truth and justice.

Most of the information attainable about this change comes from Mrs. John Cash, the daughter of a Nonconformist minister at Coventry named Sibree, with whom and his family Marian was very intimate at the time. Mr. Sibree spent much time in discussion and expostulation with her. Mrs. Cash was then a young girl, very much in love with her new friend, and sorely distressed by her change of opinions. She remembers something of one of these discussions, and says of it: "There was not only on Miss Evans's part a vehemence of tone, startling in one so quiet, but a crudeness in her objections, an absence of proposed solution of difficulties which partly distressed and partly pleased me (siding as I did mentally with my father), and which was in strange contrast to the satisfied calm which marked her subsequent treatment of religious differences. . . . I vividly remember how deeply Miss Evans was moved, and how, as she stood against the mantelpiece during the last part of the time, her delicate fingers, in which she held a small piece of muslin on which she was at work, trembled with her agitation."[1]

She did not at once attain to a settled calm in her new ideas. Simply to receive unquestioningly whatever her new friends accepted as truth was not possible for her awakened nature: the old obedience to authority could have no place in her new life, for the very essence of the new views was that they disclaimed authority, or at least demanded that it should prove its warrant. Every step of the way, every new idea must be thoroughly tested, and so quickly had she announced her change of belief that she had still a great deal of altering and arranging to effect in her mind even after the declaration had been made.

[1] Cross, p. 49.

In this troubled and unsettled state she flung away all that natural reserve in which she had hitherto shrouded her mind from all but her closest friends, and gladly welcomed all discussion which might help her to possess a clear, calm mind again. So evident was her intense longing for truth, whatever it might be, that her friends did not hesitate to ask her to receive persons whom they thought capable of arguing the cause of Christianity and winning her back to the fold. Miss Franklin, her old teacher, whose pride and affection for her pupil were much disturbed, introduced a Baptist minister, who seems to have been worsted in the argument, for as he came away he remarked to Mr. Sibree: "That young lady must have had the Devil at her elbow to suggest her doubts, for there was not a book that I recommended to her in support of Christian evidences that she had not read." She had evidently got the reverend gentleman's mind into a sad state of muddle. Another theologian, a friend of Dr. Tholück, and well versed in German criticism, also saw her several times, and was much impressed by the extent of her acquaintance with modern criticism of the New Testament.

It was all of no avail, however, the step she had taken was for her a forward one, not backward or to one side, and could not be retraced. In spite of the still unsettled state of her mind—unsettled, I mean, about various points—there was no indecision in the one chief matter. Christian dogma was for ever dethroned from her soul, and she was happy in her new freedom. A certain stiffness of manner gave way to a frank geniality and friendliness which made her happiness visible to all her friends.

Looking back on this experience a year or two later Marian writes to Miss Hennell: "The first impulse of a young and ingenuous mind is to withhold the slightest sanction from all that contains even a mixture of supposed error. When the soul is just liberated from the wretched giant's bed of dogmas on which it has been racked and stretched ever since it began to think, there is a feeling of exultation and strong hope. We think we shall run well when we get the full use of our limbs and the bracing air of independence, and we believe that we shall soon obtain something positive which will not only more than compensate us for what we have renounced, but will be so well worth offering to others, that we may venture to proselytise as fast as our zeal for truth may prompt us."[1]

Marian made no secret of her new opinions; the sense of relief and freedom and a wider horizon were too strong to be concealed. From the quotation just given it is evident that, as when she was evangelistic, she felt the need of making her inner

[1] Cross, p. 73.

life and outer life blend in a complete and harmonious whole. Just at first, however, she rather misunderstood the most effective way to do it, and wasted some strength, giving pain to herself and others, by an unnecessary aggressiveness. Yet it is but a mark of the impetuosity of youth that she wished to cast away every sign or shadow of a fetter that bound her to the old beliefs. She threw herself into her new life with concentrated energy, not minding anything at the moment but the new wide truth and her enthusiasm for it. It was with something akin to a voluntary Christian martyr's joy that she boldly and openly confessed her convictions, heedless of all consequences.

Yet the consequences, when they came, were painful enough. One has to remember that 1842 is a long time ago, and that there have been great advances in liberty of thought on religion since that date. Then, doubt was hated and dreaded as a black and fatal crime; those within the Church struggled hard—not so much to know the truth as to keep the faith; thoughtful people, troubled by hard questions and unable to come near the spirit in which Sir Thomas Browne wrote—"Methinks there be not impossibilities enough in religion for an active faith"—took refuge in the rationalistic mode of explaining the Scriptures. Anything, said respectable society, rather than Atheism.

Scientists and philosophers who had freed themselves from bondage were still rather inclined to scorn the timidity of these tethered thinkers, and so wore the aspect of militant foes; only the more advanced were capable of attaching value to, and treating with consideration, the religion from which they had separated themselves. Much bitter feeling, therefore, still existed between Christians and Freethinkers, and when a member of an orthodox family went over to the enemy there was far more consternation than there is to-day; he ran the danger of being an outcast from his old circle.

It was nearly twenty years before the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and Huxley's lectures and writings, and free, honest discussion of religious difficulties had not been granted as a right. A student taking an intellectual difficulty to his pastor was likely to be sternly reproved for daring to imagine that there was a difficulty. Even the honest, scholarly, and pious work of Isaac Taylor was reviled because it laid open a dark place in Christian history, thus giving a shock to those whose religion rested entirely on authority, and who resented knowledge which forced them to consider and to rearrange their ideas.

Naturally, this resulted in many painful family struggles, one of which took place in the home of Marian Evans. In loyalty to her new opinions, she considered it right to refuse to go to church; it would be giving sanction to error.

Mr. Evans, though no one ever attributed religious fervour to him, was closely attached to the Church as an old-established institution, a form of the government which he so deeply respected; he willingly acknowledged its authority, and could not brook defiance of it from any member of his family. Marian's refusal to attend service was an unforgiveable offence in his eyes, and by the end of February the relations between them became so strained that it was impossible to remain together, and Marian went to stay for a while with her brother at Griff. Every reader of George Eliot's works knows with what a deep, affectionate reverence she regarded family bonds. It is not difficult to see that this misunderstanding with her father must have been a great grief to her, yet her letters from Griff to Mrs. Pears show no such sadness and unrest, as do many of her earlier ones to Miss Lewis. The undercurrent of strong hope flows all through, in spite of the very real trouble she was in. Mr. Evans had put the lease of his house into an agent's hands even before Marian left Foleshill, as he intended living with his married daughter, while Marian thought of taking lodgings in Leamington and supporting herself by teaching. "There is but one woe," said she, "that of leaving my dear father—all else, doleful lodgings, scanty meals, and *gazing-stockism*, are quite indifferent to me."[1]

There is no word of resentment against her father's sternness; her only feelings towards him are the old fondness and pain at having grieved him. But she tried to prepare herself for loneliness and a severing of those dearest ties; she began to "get used to the conviction that, ivy-like as she was by nature, she must (as we see ivy do sometimes) shoot out into an isolated tree." Some friends and acquaintances were, of course, alienated by her change of views; but her brother Isaac, though he could not agree with her, took her part and tried to effect a reconciliation with her father. She found her old acquaintances at Griff seemed "to seek an opportunity of smiling on her in spite of her heresy."

During the three weeks she spent at Griff she had time to consider, and came to alter her attitude a little, regretting her impetuosity both of feeling and judging. Still, she could not, of course, nor did she at all wish to, retract her heresy. For three or four weeks she would remain at Griff, and if by that time her father was willing to receive her again she would go to him gladly; if not, she was determined to leave Griff and set about providing for herself, for she "must have a home, not a visiting-place."

Before the month was at an end, however, her brother, the Brays, and Miss Rebecca Franklin had arranged a compromise.

[1] To Mrs. Bray, Cross, p. 65.

The terms were simple: Marian was to consent to go to church as before and Mr. Evans would make no demand concerning her private opinions. On this agreement both were glad enough to resume their life together at Foleshill.

In the last year of her life George Eliot told her husband that "although she did not think she had been to blame, few things had occasioned her more regret than this temporary collision with her father, which might, she thought, have been avoided by a little management."[1]

Many religious teachers who love to quote George Eliot's beautiful passages are fond of pointing to the sadness of her spirit as the result of her alienation from orthodoxy. It has also been said that the Coventry philosophers, Strauss and G. H. Lewes, spoilt a great theologian in her.[2] Neither of these opinions accord well with the truth. George Eliot never could have been a great theologian, if "theologian" means, as Mr. Selby seems to take it, a champion of the Christian faith. Besides the fact that she found a difficulty in believing anything unless the evidence did much more than just turn the scale in its favour, she was not at all gifted in the qualities necessary for controversy. She had to say what was in her in her own way, and could not have borne to arrange her matter with special reference to individual opponents, as theological writers often must.

As to the sadness, or, rather, gravity, it was not at all the result of "no faith." It was there in its darkest hues in the days of her devout Christianity, and was due simply to temperament and a rather low physical vitality. Certainly she had found little joy in the severe and gloomy form of Christianity to which she had been attached; religion to her had been dogma, not love; she had never enjoyed the ecstasies of religion, none of the rapturous devotion that inspired the songs of Christina Rossetti ever glowed in her heart. She wanted to pour out her love on beings who were in real need of it. So she never regretted the step, never longed to retrace it. Though it was inevitable that she should occasionally look half-wistfully on those who were happy in their faith, she knew well that that faith held in it no possible gladness for her.

[1] Cross, p. 69.
[2] T. G. Selby, *The Theology of Modern Fiction—George Eliot*, p. 8.

CHAPTER VII.

LIFE AT COVENTRY, 1842–1849.

During the quiet seven years that followed George Eliot came to alter her views somewhat, especially as concerned with the proper attitude for a Freethinker to take towards those still embracing her discarded religion. Her opposition to Christianity, though it soon ceased to be active, lasted through the years at Coventry and the stay at Geneva. It was not until the riper years in London that she came to a more generous estimation of the Christian religion. As regards the personal character of Jesus, however, if her reverence for this suffered at all it was but a momentary phase, and again and again in her letters we find her referring to Him or His words with deepest admiration. The impulse to make war against the old religion as an error, and therefore harmful, soon passed away. In the letter to Miss Hennell quoted in the last chapter, she spoke of the conviction that grew upon her that one person's religious feelings are not lightly to be interfered with by another, even if that other knows his opinions to be the more reasonable. "Agreement between intellects seems unattainable, and we turn to the *truth of feeling* as the only universal bond of union. We find that the intellectual errors which we once fancied were a mere incrustation have grown into the living body, and that we cannot, in the majority of cases, wrench them away without destroying vitality. We begin to find that with individuals, as with nations, the only safe revolution is one arising out of the wants which their own progress has generated."[1]

In those who were passing through a serious time of struggle with religious difficulties her interest was keen. She threw all her influence on the side of perfect honesty, and when Mr. John Sibree, Mary's brother, who was then a theological student of Halle University, felt the difficulty of continuing in his calling because of some changes in his opinions, she discouraged any suggestion of compromise, even though "his heresies were not considered fatal," and though she fully realised what the giving up of this career meant to him.

"These are the tragedies for which the world cares so little," said she to Mary, "but which are so much to me."

These seven years (1842-9) were years of growth—sometimes quiet and comparatively happy, sometimes marked by "sturm und drang." Many questions that troubled her in the begin-

[1] Cross, pp. 73-4.

ning were either answered or set aside as unanswerable by the end of that time; many new ideas and ways of looking at things came to her through the varied scenes, the new acquaintances and long periods of quiet thought which belonged to this time. And all this was needed. The readiness with which she in her youth, through lack of confidence in herself and almost unbounded confidence in those whom she respected, accepted the teaching of others on questions of life and religion could not continue long after she reached womanhood. Her own strong sense of individuality began to assert itself and to demand that these matters should be finally settled by herself alone if she would ever find a lasting place of rest. She began to accept provisionally instead of absolutely.

The reading of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*—which probably took place in 1842, as she was reading Dr. Tholück's reply to it in the autumn of that year—would tend to strengthen this attitude. She continued to read her Bible, however, to the end of her life with great pleasure, and her love for it was no less because she regarded it now as noble poetry, carrying the authority not of an arbitrary God, but of some of the wisest of earth's seers.

The friendship with the Brays grew ever stronger and brought her much happiness, besides being a refuge in her fits of misery. Mr. Bray says: "We had long frequent walks together, and I consider her the most delightful companion I have known; she knew everything. She had little self-assertion; her aim was always to shew her friends off to the best advantage—not herself. She would polish up their witticisms and give them the *full* credit of them. But there were two sides. Hers was the temperament of genius which has always its sunny and shady side. She was frequently depressed—and often very provoking, as much so as she could be agreeable—and we had violent quarrels; but the next day, or whenever we met, they were quite forgotten and no allusion made to them. Of course, we went over all subjects in heaven and earth. We agreed in opinion pretty well at that time, and I may claim to have laid down the base of that philosophy which she afterwards retained."[1]

From him she first heard a scientific statement of the "law of consequences," which is so prominent in much of her work; they agreed together that as a sequence to this doctrine of consequences one of the greatest duties of life was "unembittered resignation to the inevitable."

She hesitated to adopt his Pantheism entirely, for she leaned somewhat to Theism, and seems to have remained undecided between the two.

[1] C. Bray, *Autobiography*, p. 73.

In these and succeeding years she read a fair amount of Spinoza's writing, and translated one of his works. Though she says little of the great philosopher, his influence most probably tended to establish her in the Pantheistic way of thought. On the whole, her philosophy at this time seems to have been very like that of Mr. Bray, though her letters do not give sufficient material for reconstructing it satisfactorily.

It is refreshing, when we think of the grave, calm, mature George Eliot, to remember that once she was young enough to quarrel and be provoking. But then one thinks of the unrest and self-ignorance, in spite of much study, that brought about these explosions, and some late words of hers rise in the mind: "There is a great deal of unmapped country within us which would have to be taken into account in an explanation of our gusts and storms."[1]

In the National Portrait Gallery there is a coloured sketch of George Eliot made by Mrs. Bray in 1842. The face is not yet beautiful; the powerful and somewhat heavy features lack the softening influence of later life, but the evidence of deep thought, the nervous, restless expression, as of one who is striving to understand, seizes and holds one's attention Her arms are quaintly folded, her hair is parted in the middle and smoothed down like a skull-cap to just above each ear, whence it falls through two combs in large bunches of brown curls on each side her face. In her light heliotrope dress of an unbeautiful, byegone fashion, she presents rather a stiff picture, and, whether it be the fault of the subject or the slighter skill of the artist, the result is not nearly so pleasing as M. Héger's pretty sketch of Charlotte Brontë, in more graceful dress and posture, which hangs near.

Soon after Marian's change of religious views the letters to Miss Lewis cease, and a new series begins, almost all addressed to her new friends, the most personal and valuable being those to Miss Hennell. This correspondence is quite different in tone, style, and subject-matter from the former one. Instead of frequent gloom, a rather laboured style, and theological discussions, we have a lighter, more natural way of writing, with a frequent note of pleasure, and here and there a touch of playfulness. Earnest talk of religion and philosophy, of course, there is still, but other interests enter largely into her life and letters. Her writing is adorned with names of great books she has been reading; the music she has heard and played casts its charm about, and over all is the bright, if intermittently tranquil, light of a mind healthily and busily engaged. The longing to do something for the service of humanity grew still stronger as time went on and she found no satisfactory means of gratifying it.

[1] *Daniel Deronda*, chap. 25.

There were the ordinary ways of philanthropy at hand—sick-visiting, relieving half-starved persons, forming clothing-clubs at the "Pudding-Pits" and the like—and to these she betook herself, as has been said, with energy, in spite of a certain misgiving that they were not exactly suited to her. She took a keen interest in Mr. Bray's efforts to aid and improve the working-people, and insisted on helping at the new infant school he had assisted to start. She could not give lessons: as she said afterwards: "I have ridiculous impulses in teaching children and always make the horizon too wide." Something, however, she did earnestly long to do, so Mrs. Bray let her begin drawings to illustrate natural history—and she *nearly* finished a squirrel.

It must have been very heart-wearying for her, with all her longing to "do good," not to find the way in which she could spend her whole self in her efforts. It is one of the most painful experiences of those who are to be great and have not yet dared to promise themselves the accomplishment of a noble work to fumble about these smaller tasks with much misgiving and self-reproof because they are not better done. Marian's education had not yet been carried far enough for her to see what is usually called philanthropy in its proper perspective; it was still the virtue that towered above all other human worth, and it was long before she fully realised that he who gives a true work of art to the world—a book, a symphony, a picture, a statue—has conferred as great a blessing on mankind as he who assisted in the emancipation of slaves or the reforming of prison rules. Even if she had known it already, it would have made little difference, for she could not yet look forward to this great happiness for herself; and so she toiled on at her philanthropic work with as good a heart as might be, glad when she could come in touch with some wide movement which should not merely help the poor to better food and clothing, but should give them power and will to raise themselves to self-respect and self-help.

Mr. Bray once spoke of the beneficial influence of evangelical beliefs on the moral feelings, upon which she said energetically: "I say it now, and I say it once for all, that I am influenced in my conduct at the present time by far higher considerations, and by a nobler idea of duty, than I ever was while I held the evangelical beliefs."[1]

But life at Coventry was not all religion and philosophy and philanthropy. One of her greatest delights at this time was in the musical evenings held at Rosehill and at the home of Miss Sibree. Marian was a good pianist—not a virtuoso as regards technical skill, but able to enjoy classical music, and, as might

[1] Cross, p. 56.

be expected, a sympathetic accompanist. One of her letters gives a glimpse of a pleasant gathering at Rosehill with violinist and flautist; she always found deep pleasure in concerted music, and the introduction to this alone must have been a great increase to the happiness of the Coventry years. At Rosehill, too, she met with distinguished men and women, among them Robert Owen and Emerson, and had the pleasure of long and serious conversations with some of them. She talked well, and her low-toned, sweet voice added to the charm of her conversation. Her face lit up, and was transfigured by eager thought and ardent feeling, so that people who saw her deeply engrossed in conversation sometimes thought her beautiful, and were astonished if they looked on her again when the animation was gone from her.

Marian was evidently delighted with Emerson, calling him "the first man I have ever seen," which probably meant that he came nearer to her notion of what man should aim at being than any other she had yet met. It was her first acquaintance with a real genius, and it would no doubt be a satisfaction to her to hear of his remark concerning herself—"That young lady has a calm, clear spirit." It was from Emerson that she heard that Carlyle shared with her the experience of being "first awakened to deep reflection by Rousseau's *Confessions*."[1]

Another good that came from her life at Coventry was the opportunity of visiting places of interest with the Brays. She accompanied them on delightful excursions, including tours to the Lakes and Scotland. They also visited Stratford together and went at least twice to London, where Marian made acquaintance with Italian opera, and had the supreme joy of hearing "Elijah" conducted by Mendelssohn. On one of these excursions she met Harriet Martineau for the first time, and another was indirectly responsible for her undertaking the translation of the *Leben Jesu*. It was in July, 1843, when the Brays, Mr. C. Hennell and Miss Hennell, Miss Evans, and Miss Brabant, another friend, went on the tour which resulted in the engagement of Miss Brabant to Mr. Hennell. In the previous year several persons, in their enthusiasm for Strauss's new work,

[1] Unfortunately I cannot find out when she read this book, as it is not mentioned in her letters; it would probably be just before or just after her removal to Coventry. It surely could not have been later than her change of religion, and if much earlier than her leaving Griff it did not make the impression on her letters that might be expected from the phrase quoted. Such a book, however, would harmonise well with her early habitual minuteness of self-study, and if read at any time between 1840 and 1842 might easily escape mention in her letters, and even for the time have no apparent influence on them, since many things were happening within and without her during that period, and the strands are now "felted" together and cannot be separated. For her acknowledgment of her debt to Rousseau, see p. 62.

had met together at the house of Mr. Joseph Parkes, of Birmingham, and agreed to raise the money necessary for the publication of an English translation. The task was assigned to Miss Brabant, daughter of a learned theologian, who was in correspondence with Strauss and several others of the most famous critics of the day. Miss Brabant was not yet twenty years of age, but already a most capable translator. The marriage with Mr. Hennell, however, interfered with her work and the *Leben Jesu* was given over to George Eliot when she had translated about half of the first volume.

Though the *Life of Jesus* was George Eliot's closest companion from January, 1844, to April, 1846, its influence on her ideas was but slight, so its subject-matter need not detain us long. As, however, it is less read now than formerly, a short account of it may not be out of place.

Strauss begins by examining the various methods of treating the New Testament from early times to his own day, decides that none, not even those of the modern German theologians who advocated the theory of symbols, was satisfactory, and suggests that the events of the Gospels may as truly be called myths as those of the early books of the Old Testament. He cannot accept them as history, because they contain miraculous elements, and no more or better evidence to support these than would be necessary for ordinary matters, and he is too much in sympathy with modern habits of thought to conclude, as was the fashion of the age of Hume and Voltaire, that they are merely conscious fiction. The substitution of the concept of myth, *i.e.*, "unconscious poetry, the *motifs* of which are supplied partly by the religious ideas which inspired the age and nation (particularly the Messianic idea), partly by the tremendous impression which the Founder of Christianity had made on His disciples," is Strauss's great contribution to religious criticism.[1]

To the objection that the time between the death of Christ and the writing of the New Testament documents is too short for the growth of myths, he answers that many were already formed by the Old Testament prophecies and the expectation of a Messiah, and only required adapting to Jesus.

George Eliot found much to admire in Strauss. Even at the end of her long labour she could say: "I do really like reading our Strauss—he is so *klar und ideenvoll*,"[2] but she was by no means a disciple of his. She did not assume the attitude of a docile and adoring pupil, eager to be taught and willing to agree with everything he said. Indeed he was so utterly unlike her in temperament that he rather roused her combative

[1] Höffding, *History of Modern Philosophy*, vol. ii., p. 270.
[2] Cross, p. 84.

spirit and made her feel inclined to contest his decision when she would have been ready to agree with Mr. Bray or Mr. Hennell. She fully recognised the importance of his theory of myths, but thought he sacrificed too much to it. "I am never pained when I think Strauss right," says she, "but in many cases I think him wrong, as every man must be in working out into detail an idea which has general truth, but is only one element in a perfect theory—not a perfect theory in itself."[1]

What separated her from Strauss, making her regard him with tranquil admiration and none of that glad reverence which she usually bestowed on her teachers, was the absence in him of the spirit of worship and the absolute exclusion of the passion of sympathy. He examines the most agonising, heart-subduing episode with the cool criticism of a scholar and scientist; never a tremor in hand or eye betrays a depth of human feeling. George Eliot could not bear without distress his unsentimental handling of what were still sacred treasures, though their meaning and value were altered. Neither beauty nor pathos stayed his relentless hand, and even the charm of a myth seemed to disappear as he touched it and passed. It seemed as if he had not only removed beautiful though cumbrous drapery from a form, but that in so doing he had left behind marks of rough and unsympathetic treatment, as if he had not fully understood the nature of either drapery or form.

Marian preferred Hennell's handling; of course, she could not compare him to so brilliant a scholar as Strauss, but he was of a more religious nature; he understood better the need of mankind in general for something to worship, and if in his theism he retained much that she would have rejected,[2] it was a pardonable fault.

With all her positive spirit she shared with the Romanticists a deep love of reverence and a delight in wonder: there was, after all, a good deal of the mystic in her nature.

To the task of translation she applied herself as to a serious duty, for she always held that it is a duty for those who love truth and who care for their race to see that great and important books are translated into all those languages in which they are likely to be needed. The translation, however, was a long and difficult piece of work, and sometimes she grew heartily weary of it. "Glad am I that anyone can enjoy Strauss," she writes; "I have ceased to sit down to him with any relish." "Leathery brain must work at leathery Strauss," says she dolefully when relinquishing what might have been a pleasant holiday. When the work was going on well, however,

[1] Cross, p. 79.

[2] "I confess that I should call many things shining ether to which Mr. Hennell allows the solid angularity of facts." (Letter to Miss Hennell, Cross, p. 91.)

and she had not too many distractions, she worked on with some satisfaction, declaring herself "not really disgusted with Strauss," though at other times she shrank from the "soul-stupefying labour." Her father had a serious illness while she was engaged on this work, but she still plodded determinedly on, nursing him tenderly and getting a few pages of translation written as well as she could.

When it was nearing completion Mrs. Bray wrote to her sister Sara that Marian "says she is Strauss-sick—it makes her ill dissecting the beautiful story of the Crucifixion, and only the sight of the Christ image" [a cast of Thorwaldsen's risen Christ] "and picture make her endure it. Moreover, as her work advances nearer its public appearance she grows dreadfully nervous. Poor thing, I do pity her sometimes, with her pale, sickly face and dreadful headaches, and anxiety too about her father. This illness of his has tried her so much, for all the time she had for rest and fresh air she had to read to him. Nevertheless, she looks very happy and satisfied sometimes in her work."[1]

A very serious cause of distress was the fact that the ardour of the gentlemen who had arranged for the translation had now cooled, and there seemed danger that Marian's labour would be all in vain.

Through the exertions of Mr. Charles Hennell and Mr. Joseph Parkes, however, the necessary £300 was at length raised, greatly to her relief.

At last it was finished. The results to her were—consciousness of a necessary and useful work performed, £20 for her work as translator, a delicious feeling of buoyancy and relief from a long strain, a valuable training in knowledge of the capabilities of the English language, and a still more confirmed tendency to let no part of her belief or action rest on a basis in any way shadowy or infirm.

Strauss sent the translator "a nice letter"—I suppose of thanks and praise—with which she was greatly pleased. He also wrote a Latin preface to the book, just the kind of thing she liked, and spoke of her work as "et accurata et perspicua."

Marian was also gratified by the review in the *Prospective:* "A faithful, elegant and scholarlike translation. Whoever reads these volumes without any reference to the German must be pleased with the easy, perspicuous, idiomatic, and harmonious force of the English style." The reviewer goes on to praise the closeness of the rendering in thought and word, and to declare that the translator must also be a man well acquainted with theology.

Miss Hennell had been a great comfort to her during this

[1] Cross, p. 82.

strenuous time, cheering her "adust soul" with "dewy thoughts," and one of the joys Marian promised herself on completion of her work was a visit to her friend Sara at her London home. "I am miserably in want of you to stir up my soul and make it shake its wings, and begin some kind of flight after something good and noble, for I am in a grovelling, slothful condition, and you are the *only* friend I possess who has an animating influence over me."[1] Besides this visit Marian looked forward to the pleasure of reading Shakspere to the Brays as her first enjoyment. The letters immediately become more cheerful. "Tell Mr. Bray I am getting too amiable for this world, and Mr. Donovan's wizard hand would detect a slight corrugation of the skin on my organs 5 and 6" (the organs of combativeness), "they are so totally without exercise."

During part of the time that George Eliot had been working at her translation there was another matter to occupy her thoughts. Most of those who already know much about her life will be astonished to learn that there is a hint of a love affair during that busy period. I can find little reliable information about it, however. Miss Blind declares that Marian was engaged, or half engaged, to a young man of much promise, but that the affair was brought to an end by Mr. Evans's dislike to the match.[2] Mr. Oscar Browning adds the information that the young man was an artist "whose subsequent career made it a happiness to her that the marriage was never carried out."[3] Sir Leslie Stephen does not mention it. None of the letters Mr. Cross has published gives any hint of it, and Canon Evans (the son of Mr. Isaac Evans) informs me that he never heard of the affair. It was probably not very serious, but something of the kind did certainly happen, for in a letter to an old school-friend, dated April 1st, 1845, not published in Mr. Cross's book, Marian writes: "What should you say to my becoming a wife? Should you think it a duty to ascertain the name of the rash man that you might warn him from putting on such a matrimonial hair-shirt as he would have with me? I did meditate an engagement, but I have determined, whether wisely or not I cannot tell, to defer it, at least for the present."[4]

Not much sign of passion there, certainly, but still one would like to know more about it, and try to estimate its share in the growth of those artistic tastes which had been so neglected before the removal to Coventry. It may also have had something to do with the depression and irritability which added variety to her pleasant friendship with the Brays—but we cannot tell.

[1] Cross, p. 84. [2] Blind, p. 24. [3] *Life*, p. 39.
[4] *Literary Anecdotes of the 19th Century*, Nicol and T. J. Wise, vol. ii., p. 474.

From her acquaintance with the Brays to the end of her life George Eliot regarded the cultivation of happiness as a duty and was deeply grieved on finding that some readers thought her books sad. While at Coventry she "practised" happiness steadily, though often her sensitive nature broke bounds and asserted its right to be miserable.

Her father's failing health and last long illness necessarily caused her much pain and fatigue, and she writes in one of her letters: "For the present my address is Grief Castle on the River Gloom in the Valley of Dolour."

It was very seldom that she wrote of unhappiness without acknowledging that she had been ill, or admitting that it was but a passing mood, growing pains of the spirit, and that at heart she knew the world to be better than it seemed at the moment. After one of these falls into the slough of despond she wrote: "I think there can be few who more truly feel than I that this is a world of bliss and beauty—that is, that bliss and beauty are the end, the tendency of creation; and evils are the shadows that are the only conditions of light in the picture, and I live in much, much enjoyment."[1]

Again, in the Strauss period, she says: "I am quite happy, only sometimes feeling 'the weight of all this unintelligible world.'" A few months after the publication of her translation she was enjoying the delight of good health and could cry out to her friend Sara, "All the world is bathed in glory and radiance to me now, and thou sharest in the radiance."[2]

In spite of relapses into fits of wretchedness—for which her delicate health and habits of strenuous study were largely responsible—she declared again and again that she grew ever happier as she grew older, and had little patience with the fallacy that childish days are the happiest.

The artistic side of her nature now developed freely and steadily. A mere glance at the books read at Griff and those enjoyed at Coventry would show a great difference of choice and taste. No more Edward Young or Hannah More, no dull and pious memoirs or works of religious exhortation. Formerly the mere subject of a book was what mattered chiefly to her, the substance[3] was of less importance. Let a book be about Eternity or Salvation, and it seemed more imperative to be read than a beautiful poem. Now, free from the limitations of theology, she could give full play to those instincts which had hitherto been crushed and starved. She could read Shakspere, in whom she delighted more than in any other mind, without thinking that she ought to be studying Church government.

Among the writers she loved best in the Coventry days were

[1] Cross, p. 70. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 86. [3] I use Dr. A. C. Bradley's distinction. See his *Oxford Lectures* on "Poetry for Poetry's Sake."

Schiller, whose works she read a great deal with her German pupils—Mrs. Bray and Miss Sibree—Emerson, Richardson, Rousseau and George Sand. She also read much Italian and began to enjoy the Æneid.[1]

A letter written on February 9th, 1849, to Miss Hennell shows that she has made great advance in her apprenticeship to life. While at Griff she had lamented that she was "unstable as water" and found it extremely hard to come to a decision on "controverted matters," but now she has advanced a great way in self-reliance, and if she still forms opinions slowly, she does not do so in fear and trembling. She has learnt that after all one's inner self, which is the best and surest guide, must in the end be also judge, and for the future she will put herself into no hands save her own, but will rely on what light and knowledge she has, listening to the teaching of the great and wise, learning from them if possible, but never giving up the guidance of her soul to another. "I wish you thoroughly to understand," she writes, "that the writers who have most profoundly influenced me—who have rolled away the waters from their bed, raised new mountains and spread delicious valleys for me—are not in the least oracles to me. It is just possible that I may not embrace one of their opinions—that I may wish my life to be shaped quite differently from theirs. For instance, it would signify nothing to me if a very wise person were to stun me with proofs that Rousseau's views of life, religion and government are miserably erroneous—that he was guilty of some of the worst *bassesses* that have degraded civilised man. I might admit all this, and it would be not the less true that Rousseau's genius has sent that electric thrill through my intellectual and moral frame which has awakened me to new perceptions—which has made man and nature a fresh world of thought and feeling to me; and this not by

[1] Her admiration for Richardson, whose careful minute analysis of the human heart was akin to her own genius, though far narrower in its scope, was a thing to be expected. It was through *Sir Charles Grandison* that she made his acquaintance, and she felt none of the modern critic's objection to the perfection of the hero. This readiness to accept a blameless man as human shows in her not so much an undeveloped artistic sense as a great faith in the goodness of human nature. She could herself imagine a man as faultless as Sir Charles and saw no reason why he should not exist. Almost her last work has as hero a man who rouses the same uneasy objections. Daniel Deronda is too good to be true, for, being so spotless, so exalted, he became to Gwendolen Harlech as a priest, a pope, almost a Christ. It was George Eliot's attempt to express what help and hope the highest humanity has to offer. She once said of Francis Newman: "His soul is a blessed *yea*. There is a sort of blasphemy in that proverbial phrase 'Too good to be true.'" She also would create a soul which should be a "blessed yea." Perhaps she failed, perhaps it is we who fail, for we do not all "know the highest when we see it." At any rate some of us have gone so far as to call Deronda a prig.

teaching me any new belief. It is simply that the rushing, mighty wind of his inspiration has so quickened my faculties that I have been able to shape more definitely for myself ideas which had previously dwelt as dim *Ahnungen* in my soul; the fire of his genius has so fused together old thoughts and prejudices, that I have been ready to make new combinations."[1] This passage shows that now, at any rate, she had learnt the highest use of reading. She had never passed through the perilous experience of a self-mistrusting university student who is sorely tempted to read merely that he can give a good account of a book, form an accurate idea of the style, and keep the whole in his memory for examination purposes. This method of reading has its value for special purposes, but it is little better than semi-starvation to a developing mind, and has serious dangers for a growing artist. George Eliot learned early to assimilate what she read. During the Coventry days she learned more—she learned how to put herself into communion with the quickening spirit which had given life to the book and draw vital energy thence for herself. A book was now a power in her life, not so much because it taught her something as because it made her the more able to teach herself.

There is one other interesting passage in this letter. It has to do with Maggie Tulliver's own copy of à Kempis: "I have at last the most delightful 'De Imitatione Christi' with quaint woodcuts. One breathes a cool air as of cloisters in the book. It makes one long to be a saint for a few months. Verily its piety has its foundations in the depth of the divine-human soul."[2]

This time of slow and large growth was not without inward intimations of powers yet undeveloped. As with Aurora Leigh:

> "Some royal blood
> Would seem to tingle in her now and then
> With sense of power and ache—with imposthumes
> And manias usual to the race."

These immature powers were not unintelligible. They inclined strongly to literature,[3] but they were still inarticulate, and though she felt their strength, and though all her friends recognised her as a woman of unusual make, she had no warrant in her soul that they would ever be perfected. She dreamed of fame but knew not how it was to be acquired. After the

[1] Cross, pp. 107-8. She goes on to acknowledge a somewhat similar debt to George Sand.

[2] Cross, p. 108.

[3] George Eliot does not seem ever to have contemplated the idea of being a scholar. The dislike she had for forming opinions may have had something to do with this, also the lack of interest and memory for minute details, such as made Romola unfitted for a scholar (scholastic details I mean, of course; she was never weary of details relating directly to human life).

publication of *Adam Bede* she wrote to Mrs Bray: "I often think of my dreams when I was four or five and twenty. I thought then how happy fame would make me!"[1]

Yet it was not a vain desire for admiration that turned her dreams towards fame. It was the overmastering necessity for self-expression, the longing of the artist-soul to express, the craving of the living human self to be expressed—this was the chief part of what she called desire for fame. She was stretching out eagerly towards her kind, loving them, longing to be known and loved by them; she thought, too, how sweet it would be to bring a finely executed piece of work and rejoice over it with those she had known and loved for many years. That was Maggie Tulliver's way of dreaming, and her creator had the same trait.

But as yet all this craving for self-expression was unsatisfied, was just so much pain with very little to ease it. Longing to express—to be expressed—but through what medium? Turn about restlessly as she would, *that* would not make itself clear. The work on Strauss was but an attempt to stave off hunger by large draughts of cold water; it was no more real, comforting satisfaction than when a lad about to burst into song with all his heart and voice is bidden to draw cubes and cylinders instead. Now and then came a timid, flickering hope that one day she might write a novel—her interest in her kind could not but suggest it—but she felt as yet incapable of anything but the descriptive parts. There was absolutely nothing on which she could lay her hand and say, "This is my part of the world's work; this will I do with all my might in spite of all the powers of earth or air that may strive to hinder me."

Once when her husband, Mr. Cross, was urging her to write her autobiography she said, half-sighing, half-smiling: "The only thing I should care much to dwell on would be the absolute despair I suffered from of ever being able to achieve anything. No one could have felt greater despair, and a knowledge of this might be a help to some other struggler," adding with a smile, "but, on the other hand, it might only lead to an increase of bad writing."[2]

This despair was probably rather the experience of the Coventry and following years than earlier ones. As a child she had been convinced that she would do something big in the world, and if despair came, though it is black and bitter to the young, it is generally quickly succeeded by hope. At Griff she probably hoped strongly in spite of theological gloom, but when one is nearing thirty and still half-ignorant of one's powers, it is then that despair begins to grow not only in intensity but in extensity and to spread over all one's life and thoughts.

[1] Cross, p. 281. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

There were some who half-suspected the existence in her of capabilities which were yet hidden. When Marian was looking her best and happiest after the completion of Strauss, Mrs Bray wrote that she "looks very brilliant just now. We fancy she must be writing her novel." But Mrs. Bray's budding faith must have died early, for she never guessed the identity of "George Eliot," even when *Adam Bede* had followed the *Scenes from Clerical Life*, and Marian had to reveal it to her herself. Often in those days Marian longed for assurance of her gifts.[1] Though busied with philosophical translation her love was still for imaginative literature, and once when she and Miss Sibree were reading Schiller she took the volume and placed his works together, saying, "Oh, if *I* had given these to the world, how happy I should be!" She was afraid, however, as she told Mr. John Sibree, that "the older the world gets, originality becomes less possible. Great subjects are used up, and civilisation tends evermore to repress individual predominance, highly-wrought agony, or ecstatic joy. But all the gentler emotions will be ever new, ever wrought up into more and more lovely combinations, and genius will probably take their direction."[2] Though we may demur at the sweeping nature of these assertions, and think them evidence of a lingering crudity of thought, yet one can see the bearing of them on her future work. She never felt herself capable of writing a *Prometheus* or an *Œdipus* even in these early years: she had got to know herself so far as to see that her genius, if she had any, must deal for the most part with homely people and incidents. She had not yet, perhaps, quite realised what noble literature may come of this, but the concluding sentence is prophetic.

Meanwhile she was troubled by what she called her "lack of industry"; she seemed to grudge the time spent in recreation, but all the while she was making the best possible preparation for her future work. She was growing like a young oak, making little show, but sending her roots deep down into the earth—into human nature. Among these people who had known her for years she had opportunities of getting acquainted with the mysteries of humanity more varied than she could have had at Griff, more thorough and satisfactory than she had afterwards in London. Every person with whom she came in contact was an object of interest to her, however commonplace or simple his character, and she loved to get to the very mainsprings of his life and know him through and through. In one way this interest was as keen and searching as that of a biologist in the

[1] Probably it was now that she became conscious of the happy absence of shyness and awkwardness in workmen "who are never wondering what is their business in the world."—*Adam Bede*, chap. xxiv.

[2] Cross, p. 96.

creature he is studying, but it was saved from being hard and impertinent by the intense love and sympathy which she felt for men and women. Love had even more to do with her interest than had longing for knowledge, and she most truly felt with those whom she studied. Everyone, friends and servants, even strangers, felt the magnetism of her loving interest and gladly responded to it.

"Everyone talks of himself or herself to me," she writes to Mr. John Sibree, "and I beg you will follow everyone's example in this one thing only. Individuals are precious to me in proportion as they unfold to me their intimate selves. I have just had lent me the journal of a person who died some years ago. When I was less venerable I should have felt the reading of such a thing insupportable; now it interests me, though it is the simplest record of events and feelings."[1]

Of the delightful gift of description which contributes so much to the charm of her books there is little sign yet, but this is easy to understand, as she was writing to persons who knew the districts she knew and described so beautifully as well as herself. The humour in her letters, so far as it exists, is of the kind we find in her works when she writes "in propria persona"; there is no trace of the delicious, homely wit of Mrs. Poyser.

She already experienced the joy of utterance, but it was simply the utterance of her own feelings to her friends, and she required in return the same fulness of speech from them. "It is necessary to me, not simply to *be*, but to *utter*, and I require utterance of my friends. What is it to me that I think the same thoughts? I think them in a somewhat different fashion."[2]

And, again, "What is anything worth until it is uttered? Is not the universe one great utterance? There is not opportunity for many deeds of love, but much for words—and I would take no deeds as an adequate compensation for the frigid, glassy eye and hard indifferent tones of one's very solid and sensible and conscientious friend."

A rather different way of treating the case of deeds and words than the usual one, but characteristic nevertheless.

Three lessons she had thoroughly learnt and taught assiduously to Miss Sibree—tolerance, accuracy, and the value of time—lessons priceless alike to the artist and the philosopher. She liked in these days to travel that she might get away from herself,[3] might "take herself up by the ears and

[1] Cross, p. 97.
[2] Letter to Mr. J. Sibree, Cross, p. 100.
[3] It was always very difficult for her to do this. Self-consciousness was one of the tortures of her youth. Again and again in her novels she speaks of the grace and attractiveness of moments when self-consciousness is in abeyance. We find instances in Janet and Gwendolen and nearly every other heroine. She must often, in her girlhood, have seen the charm in other girls and felt its lack in herself—that self from which she could almost never get away, it was so hurrying, so fast-growing, so full of demands, and her opportunities for satisfying it were so small.

inspect herself like any other queer monster on a small scale." Pity that she has not left us anywhere the result of such an inspection. Indeed, her letters are much less about herself as the years go by; the centre of interest for her is gradually changing from self to humanity, and her letters contain many discussions of many subjects, with herself figuring there less than of old.

In 1849 George Eliot began to translate Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and found it a relief and a rest for her mind when she could spare an hour from attendance on her father. Her first published piece of prose, except the translation of Strauss, appeared the same year in the *Coventry Herald* of March 16th, 1849. It was not an ambitious attempt—just a short notice of Froude's *Nemesis of Faith*, which she much admired, but it brought her a charming note from the author, which caused her to run to the Brays in high glee.

There is nothing remarkable about this attempt except her expression "the spawn of the Press." She chooses for quotation those passages that contain adverse criticism of the clergymen of the day, and seems heartily to agree with them. Impatience with the Church and its ways, and growing regard for the power of the Press is very evident. "God abolished (religious) tests for all purposes, except of mischief and vexation, when He gave mankind the printing press."

Froude had probably heard some of these expressions from her lips. At any rate, he recognised the review as her work—and he does not seem to have objected to her writing:—"We are sure that its author is a bright, particular star, though he sometimes leaves us in doubt whether he be not a fallen 'son of the morning.'"

During the last two or three years at Coventry most of her time and strength were spent on a very precious, but sad, duty—the nursing of her father through his last long illnesses. She loved nursing, and liked to have the care of a sickroom, "with its twilight and tiptoe stillness and helpful activity." She "always had a peculiarly peaceful feeling in such a scene." Her father's last illness, however, was long and very trying, for there was little or no hope of recovery, and the thought of his loss was scarcely to be borne.

During all this time she read much aloud to him, chiefly from Scott's novels, of which both were extremely fond.

Her own health and spirits suffered much from the strain, but she tried hard to keep bright, and clung firmly to the joy to be got from the happiness of others. "This from my doleful prison of stupidity and barrenness, with a yawning trap-door ready to let me down into utter fatuity. But I can even yet feel the omnipotence of a glorious chord. Poor pebble as I am, left entangled among slimy weeds, I can yet hear from afar

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the rushing of the blessed torrent, and rejoice that it is there to bathe and brighten other pebbles less unworthy of the polishing."[1]

As the illness drew near a close, every hour with him was treasured. On the morning of the day on which he died she wrote to the Brays: "What shall I be without my father? It will seem as if part of my moral nature were gone."

His death occurred on the 31st of May, 1849. Marian was thoroughly exhausted with the long strain and confinement, and grieved deeply for his loss. The greatness of her love for him is seen again and again throughout her works in a tenderly drawn characteristic of some lovable, fatherly man, in the affection and esteem which Caleb Garth and Adam Bede awake in our minds, and in the loyal, ardent devotion of Romola.

[1] To Miss Hennell, Cross, p. 105.

CHAPTER VIII.

GENEVA, 1849—1850.

When, after long, painful watching and waiting the dreaded grief has come upon us, when body and soul are sick and exhausted, and the object round which life and affections were twined has at last been taken from us, the best refreshing, the sweetest healing we can have is to seek our Mother Earth in her loveliest aspect, and rest awhile alone with her.

It was well for Marian that this was made easy for her. Weary and grief-stricken as she was, she could not have taken up her life again at that moment and attempted to give it shape and provide it with a home without intense suffering. Happily, the Brays had already planned a journey to the Continent; they invited Marian to join them, and in less than a fortnight after her father's death they set out.

She was thin and pale and weak, and took little pleasure in the journey, though her friends did all they could to cheer her. They passed through France, visiting Paris, and other interesting or beautiful places, and then proceeded to the north of Italy, through which they reached Switzerland and stayed a little while at Geneva. Marian had not yet recovered health or spirits, and her nervous system was so unstrung that the beauty of the glorious mountain scenery did not affect her half so much as the terror of the high passes. Yet even this weakness she could master at need. The party was crossing the Col de Balme from Martigny to Chamounix when it was suddenly discovered that one of the side-saddles was defective. Marian insisted on having that saddle, though there was danger of the rider being tumbled off without a moment's warning.[1]

When they reached Geneva the magic charm of the place which had attracted Voltaire and Rousseau, Byron and Shelley, and had also been the home of Calvin—once a supreme power in her life—fell also upon her. No doubt the rich literary reminiscences of the place added greatly to the magnetic power of its beauty, for she was very susceptible to such memories, and loved to wander in places hallowed by the affections or intimacy of those great minds that she admired. Only the year before she had written: "Oh, the bliss of having a very high attic in a romantic continental town, such as Geneva—far

[1] Blind, p. 51.

away from morning callers, dinners and decencies, and then to pause for a year and think *de omnibus rebus et quibusdam aliis*, and then to return to life, and work for poor stricken humanity, and never think of self again."[1]

Her daughterly affection and duty had made it impossible then, but now there was no reason at all why she should not gratify this desire. No ties bound her very closely to any other being; she was not an absolute necessity, nor even a chief part of the happiness of any home in the world—in that, indeed, lay the bitterest part of her sorrow. She had an income large enough to make it just possible to settle down here quietly for a few months, and so it was decided that the Brays should return alone, and leave her to seek rest and peace by lake and mountain. From July to October she stayed at the Campagne Plongeon, where she found some pleasant society, but no one with whom she had strong intellectual or moral sympathy. Now that she was among strangers and writing to those who knew her, her close observation of, and keen interest in, every human being about her become at once strikingly apparent. Her letters are full of descriptions of the people with whom she has become acquainted, and the power of her character-drawing is already shewn by the interest we are obliged to take in these people, though they pass quickly across the stage and are seen no more.

She was soon perfectly comfortable. "Everyone is kind to me and seems to like me," she writes to the Brays; but she begs for plenty of letters from the dear friends whose place none can take. She sent for her books, and when they came, after a long and vexatious delay, settled down to read, and talk and play just as fancy led her, taking just "a dose of mathematics every day to prevent my brain from becoming quite soft." Spinoza was of course laid aside, and the only set work she did was attending a course of lectures on Experimental Physics by Professor de la Rive.

When her health began to mend and her sorrow to lose its harshness, she was able to enjoy the beauty of her surroundings, though she continued to describe the features of the persons about her much more than the scenery. Yet the loveliness of the place was a never-ceasing good to her. She had seen and delighted in the English and Scotch mountains and lakes, but as she had never stayed among them more than a week or two they never gained the influence of familiar friends. Now she gave herself up gladly to influences which brought repose and strength and highest resignation. As the months passed, her fits of depression became less frequent, and a quiet content gradually came to reign in her letters.

[1] Cross, p. 100.

The happiest part of her stay was no doubt the five months from October to March that she spent with M. and Mme. D'Albert. Not only had her health and spirits somewhat improved, but the society at M. D'Albert's was far more congenial to her than that of Plongeon. M. D'Albert was an artist,[1] endowed with delicacy and beauty of mind, character and behaviour.

He and George Eliot became friends almost immediately, and remained so to the end of her life. Before she had been there three weeks she wrote to the Brays: "For M. D'Albert, I love him already as if he were father and brother both." Indeed, he seems to have possessed almost every charm that one can imagine, and never to have offended in the smallest degree that extreme fastidiousness which lingered long enough to make her, even at this stage, find more attraction in perfect grace than in rugged strength. A Felix Holt would not have been at all a suitable host for her just then.

Mme. D'Albert was almost, if not quite, as delightful as her husband—cultured, kind, an excellent housekeeper, treating Marian with the utmost consideration and affection. "I have infinite tenderness from Mme. D'Albert," she says in another letter. "I call her always 'maman,' and she is just the creature one loves to lean on and be petted by." "She kisses me like a mother, and I am baby enough to find that a great addition to my happiness." During the rest of the stay at Geneva, George Eliot's letters are full of grateful and affectionate allusions to her new friends.

When she had got over her first alarm at the flights of "cold, dark-looking stone steps" she was able to realise her dream to the full, even to the detail of apartments high above the earth; and the sensation of being "in a downy nest high up in a good old tree" suited her exactly.

Besides the enjoyable conversation of M. D'Albert, from which she seemed to be always learning something, there were many pleasures to be had, for her host was an artist in more branches of art than one. He was an excellent singer, and held very enjoyable musical evenings once a week, at which he and his friends sometimes sang Masses. The drama also interested him, and Marian saw some capital acting of comedies by friends of M. D'Albert.

Altogether, she became so happy there, and wrote such blithesome letters to Rosehill, that her old friends suspected her of exaggerating in order to give them pleasure. She had no need to exaggerate, however, for she was in a very pleasant haven; and more cheerful and at ease than she had been for years.

[1] One of the most charming of the portraits of George Eliot was done by M. D'Albert during her stay at Geneva. It is reproduced as frontispiece to vol. ii. of Cross's *Life* in the three-volume edition.

Underneath the gladness, however, was the deep dissatisfaction and unrest which were the result of having no definite object in life, and every now and then this would come to the surface. It is this undercurrent, of both older and later date than the transient happiness, that she best remembered when, after she had at last found her work, she wrote of that time: "I was very unhappy and in a state of discord and rebellion towards my own lot."[1]

"I am becoming passionately attached to the mountains, the lake, the streets, my own room, and, above all, the dear people with whom I live," she writes. Besides the unsettled state of the future there were only two drawbacks to her happiness, the first of them—the absence of English comforts in a very severe winter—was but slight, though the second one, the separation from her people and her dear friends, was more serious. She stayed at Geneva eight months, long enough to become much refreshed and strengthened, and to feel, if not an appetite for the strife of life, yet an uneasiness at being absent from it. It is characteristic of her strenuous moral nature that she several times expressed alarm lest she should be deteriorating for want of discipline, and not all the charms of Geneva could keep her when she felt capable of facing life once more.

M. D'Albert decided to accompany her to England, and about the middle of March she said a regretful good-bye to the place which had so nourished and comforted her, and set her face towards home.

They had a bad journey, suffering severely from the cold; but at last it was over, and after a night spent in London, Marian went on alone to Coventry. It must have been very strange to her then to think of all that had taken place during the past year; besides her grief and consolation there were the valuable experiences which had enriched her memory and imagination; the wider acquaintance with "cities of men and manners," and the deepened conviction of the great likeness that underlies the bewildering variety of human nature. One important result of her stay in Geneva was her increased interest in painting, an interest which brought ever greater pleasure as long as her life lasted. There was also the new experience of having her life entirely under her own management, of standing alone without either the support or the burden of another being whose consent was necessary before she could take a serious step in any direction. A valuable experience, this, to one naturally so diffident: an experience, however, that is often connected with bitterest pain and lonely agony. To her, fortunately for her frail body, it was made as gentle and sweet as it possibly could be; learnt at the very heart of Nature with kindest human ministry to aid her.

[1] Cross, p. 298.

One might have thought that here, if anywhere, she would have come to fuller knowledge of herself and her powers, but she made no great progress in that direction. Partly it was because she was for much of the time too weary and worn to make further struggle; she needed to gather strength, not use it; and partly because some strong, explicit human belief in her was necessary before she could believe in herself. Is there, one wonders, some flickering, faintly struggling hope in this passage I am about to quote, or is it half-bitter, half-playful self-mockery? "Keep me for seven years longer and you will find out the use of me, like all other pieces of trumpery."[1] Curiously enough, but a few months over the seven years had passed when the Editor of *Blackwood* was reading *Amos Barton.*

Encouragement she certainly needed. As she said plaintively herself: "I want encouraging rather than warning and checking. . . . If human beings would believe it, they do me most good by saying to me the kindest things truth will permit."[2] She was still rising slowly, however, above her innate tendency to leaning submission, and that shrinking from daring effort which was in great part due to her frail health. So she writes from Geneva: "I am beginning to lose respect for the petty acumen that sees difficulties. I love the souls that rush along to their goal with a full stream of sentiment—that have too much of the positive to be harassed by the perpetual negatives—which, after all, are but the disease of the soul, to be expelled by fortifying the principle of vitality."[3]

Duty and affection, the two strongest motives in her being, drew her back to England, away from beautiful, tranquil, inspiriting Geneva, and back to the quiet, quaint old town of the Midlands. She returned full of eager expectation, longing to embrace her old friends, and to comfort her sister Chrissey, who had recently lost her baby daughter. But somehow, when she arrived again at Rosehill, and visited Griff, and stayed a few days with her sister, things were not just as she had hoped. Perhaps she felt more fully the unenviable conviction that she was "a sort of supernumerary spoon," the loss of which would spoil no set. Perhaps she realised more clearly the blank that had come into her life with the loss of her father and the breaking up of her old home; perhaps she missed, more than she expected to miss, the artistic elegance and pleasures of M. D'Albert's home, or it may have been simply that the weather and climate and surroundings were less exhilarating—probably something of all these, combined with the dull flatness which succeeds the realisation of a long-expected moment, was responsible for the doleful tone of her first letters after her

[1] To the Brays, Cross, p. 117. [2] Cross, pp. 121-22.
[3] Ibid., p. 125.

arrival. Her friends were as kind to her as ever, yet she cries to Sara: "Oh, the dismal weather, and the dismal country, and the dismal people! It was some envious demon that drove me across the Jura. However, I am determined to sell everything I possess except a portmanteau and a carpet bag and the necessary contents, and be a stranger and a foreigner on the earth for evermore."[1]

She was experiencing the unsettled state of mind which she has given to Deronda at about the same age. In his case, "A soul burning with a sense of what the Universe is not, and ready to take all existence as fuel, is nevertheless held captive by the ordinary wire-work of social forms, and does nothing particular." It only needed the vision of something worth doing to make the prisoner burst through the wire-work, but both had to wait some time for that. Meanwhile, Marian's fears painted the future for her, not her hopes. Soon, however, this unhappy feeling abated a little, and she took up her life with courage again to make the best of it she could. And at that moment the best seemed to be to write an article on Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect* for the *Westminster Review*.

It was not what she would have chosen, but it was the best that offered. And to what would she have stretched out her hand if of all happy and blessed lots she might have made her choice? The answer is given in a tone of quiet self-abnegation, no joyous enthusiasm, only a deep longing for peace, a peace to be obtained by loyal devotion to an everyday duty.

"The only ardent hope I have for my future life is to have given to me some woman's duty—some possibility of devoting myself where I may see a daily result of pure calm blessedness in the life of another."[2]

There was, however, neither artist's nor woman's work for her yet, only something that pleased her less than either, yet was there, waiting to be done, and worth doing.

From her return to England to September of the following year George Eliot made her home chiefly at Rosehill. In October, 1850, two visitors came, Mr. Mackay and Mr. Chapman, who was then arranging to take over the *Westminster Review*. It was probably then that Marian consented to write the article on the *Progress of the Intellect*, and there seems also to have been some mention of going to London on the staff of the *Review* when the purchase of it should be completed.

Her article was published in the January number. It gives one the impression of being a very careful, conscientious piece of work, and the reader is aware of the writer's anxiety to be just. On the whole it is very appreciative, and when she differs in opinion from Mr. Mackay she does it as modestly as possible.

[1] Cross, p. 133. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

Though thoughtful and capable, it is not a brilliant achievement, and, like her other early reviews, was not chosen by her to be reprinted. The style has much of the dignity we find in the early novels, something, too, of the grace, but little of the beauty and resonance; it is not yet quickened by the fine, almost imperceptible vibrations of strong, warm feeling. The scientific illustrations which became so frequent in her later novels are already in evidence, but are not yet abstruse. A passage in which she spoke of "that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organisations, our ethics, and our religion," shows that the recognition of undeviating law was still present with her, holding a foremost place in her thoughts. This was a very convenient bridge by which she might pass over to Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, but I do not think that, even if she read his work, he exerted any great influence on her, perhaps none at all, until she became acquainted with some of his disciples.

The greater part of 1851 was spent at Rosehill, but with long visits to London. Mr. Chapman also paid several visits to the Brays, and George Eliot helped in determining and getting into shape the prospectus of the new series of the *Westminster Review*. By the end of September all was arranged, and Marian was established as a boarder at Mr. Chapman's house, in the Strand, being now appointed assistant editor of the *Review*.

She must have left Coventry with some misgivings, for the life she was going to live was quite untried and promised to be a very serious, business-like matter. Still, the old life now was but stagnation; the new life would be at least "a bringer of new things." It was probably the best that could have happened to her. She had learnt thoroughly all there was to learn at Griff and Coventry, and was athirst for more. Most of the materials she was to use in her novels was already gathered, but it needed ripening and mellowing by time and still more by distance; not until she got quite away from the persons she had studied could she get a right view of them and see where they differed from others and what were the characteristics to be emphasised. Probably if she had remained with the Brays she would have been for ever inarticulate, for the writing of such reviews as might have come her way could by no means have been an articulation of the things she had to say. Almost certainly she would never have met Lewes, and without Lewes there had been no *Mill on the Floss*, no *Middlemarch*, no one of all her works.

CHAPTER IX.

LONDON. THE "WESTMINSTER REVIEW," 1851—1854.

The *Westminster Review* had been founded by the Benthamites in 1824, and for some years had been edited by John Stuart Mill. He was succeeded by Mr. Hickson and the latter by Mr. Chapman. The new Editor was determined to make it an organ, not of any particular philosophical or political party, but of the widest and most progressive thought of the time. Its programme was a generous one: it included articles by the best writers on nearly every important subject—literary, philosophical, social and political—and Mr. Chapman hoped to make the *Review* a success by keeping it at a high standard and never lowering that standard in order to gain popularity. Among the contributors during the time in which George Eliot was sub-editor were Herbert Spencer, Harriet Martineau, J. S. Mill, Froude, Mazzini, G. H. Lewes, and many others whose names are more or less known to-day. Miss Evans became acquainted with most of these, and indeed with nearly all the eminent writers of the day who wrote on serious matters.

Many of Mr. Chapman's friends were admirers of Comte, whose *Positive Philosophy* was just beginning to make an impression in England, but there were also thinkers of a very different stamp; for instance, Carlyle, who, although he could not be persuaded to write on any of the "three glorious subjects" offered him in a "most insinuating letter" by the sub-editor of the *Westminster*, was frequently to be met with in a social way.

Marian's position as an inmate of Mr. Chapman's house was an excellent one for becoming acquainted with literary people, as several other members of the staff boarded there also, and she saw much of them and their friends. The prevailing tone of thought in the society with which she came in contact here was Positivist, the leaders of the Positivists being J. S. Mill and Mr. Lewes, both of whom were profound admirers of Comte, and did much to make him known in England.

The sudden plunge into an entirely new way of life with so many new people and so much new work was very exciting and disturbing, but it was also very interesting: she liked being there, and was afraid the country would seem dull after it. Of course there was a good deal of drudgery, "great, dreary articles" to be read and got into shape, masses of proofs to correct, silly novels and the like to be reviewed, but on the whole she enjoyed the first year or two very well, for she was not of that impatient temper that cannot endure drudging toil.

Besides, there were many facilities for enjoyment in London that were not to be had at Coventry. Many a happy evening was spent at the theatre, the opera, and concerts; there were pleasant soirées at Chapman's house to which celebrities came who had been known to her only by name before, and she found occasional opportunities for long walks and talks. Her days were now very full, and her letters, in consequence, became hurried. The greater part of her correspondence with the Brays and Miss Hennell seems to consist of brief accounts of details connected with the *Review*. Here is an extract which shows what a busy day was like, and they were many:—"Both callers and work thickens—the former sadly interfering with the latter. I will just tell you how it was last Saturday, and that will give you an idea of my days. My task was to read an article of Greg's in the *North British* on Taxation, a heap of newspaper articles, and all that J. S. Mill says on the same subject. When I had got some way into this *magnum mare*, in comes Mr. Chapman with a thick German volume. 'Will you read enough of this to give me your opinion of it?' Then, of course, I must have a walk after lunch, and when I had sat down again, thinking that I had two clear hours before dinner, rap at the door—Mr. Lewes, who, of course, sits talking till the second bell rings. After dinner another visitor, and so behold me, at 11 p.m., still very far at sea on the subject of Taxation, but too tired to keep my eyes open."[1]

She made many friends, or began to make them, between 1851 and 1853. The chief of them during the first year or two was Mr. Herbert Spencer. Lewes called him her "excellent friend," and she wrote of him to Miss Hennell: "My brightest spot, next to my love of *old* friends, is the deliciously calm, *new* friendship that Herbert Spencer gives me. We see each other every day, and have a delightful *camaraderie* in everything. But for him my life would be desolate enough."[2] Spencer took care that his new friend's life should not be desolate. Many a delightful evening spent at the opera or the theatre was due to his thoughtful friendliness. Spencer, in his recently published *Autobiography*, affords some enlightening

[1] Cross, p. 155. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

glimpses into the London life. He first met her when she visited Chapman in the summer of 1851, and before the end of the next year they were firm friends. She was "the most admirable woman, mentally," that he had ever met, and in his frequent visits at Chapman's house "the greatness of her intellect, conjoined with her womanly qualities and manner," kept him by her side.[1] Spencer noted how striking in its power her face was in repose, and how a smile transfigured it; a smile, never of mere amusement, but always containing sympathy. Not that she at all despised fun. For two months or more she and Chapman teased him a good deal about a wife they were finding for him; but when, after much fun and difficulty, they were brought together, neither of the interested persons approved the choice.

The friends used to walk together on the terrace below Somerset House engaged in merry chat, or discussing earnestly deep questions in philosophy. They read Comte's *Introduction* together, but differed in their opinions on it, she being inclined to go farther in agreement with the French philosopher than he. Impressed by the power of her intellect and the breadth of her sympathy, Spencer suggested that she should write a novel, but she had not sufficient faith in herself to try.[2] It was not surprising that, seeing them so constantly together, people drew certain conclusions. "There were reports that I was in love with her, and that we were about to be married. But neither of these reports was true."[3] Their feeling for each other was not more or less than that of perfect, harmonious friendship, and this friendship was one of those that endured to her death.

Spencer found her then, as her readers knew her later—conscientious, just, indignant against wrong, yet tolerant and forgiving.[4] The long years of self-study had combined with certain traits in her character to produce a state of mind which made ease and abandon difficult: "She complained of being troubled by a double consciousness—a current of self-criticism being an habitual accompaniment of anything she was saying or doing, and this naturally tended towards self-depreciation and self-distrust."[5]

To him, too, she owed a still more important and eventful friendship, for it was he who made her acquainted with George Henry Lewes. It was in the latter part of 1851 that Spencer took him to call on her, but the difference in their temperaments made the growth of the acquaintance between Lewes and Marian much slower than that between her and Spencer.

Three other very sweet friendships were formed during this short period—those with Miss Bessie Parkes (afterwards Mme.

[1] Herbert Spencer, *Autobiography*, vol. i., p. 395. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 398.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 399. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 396. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 396.

Belloc), Mrs. Peter Taylor, and Miss Barbara Smith (Mme. Bodichon), all three of whom became her lifelong friends.[1]

Mr. Parkes was a Warwickshire man, who delighted to have George Eliot at his house among learned men, and she often used to go in the evening, generally dressed, as Mme. Belloc tells us, in black velvet. This friend also adds that no one suspected her of a tinge of imagination in those days, though her company was much sought by intellectual men and women.[2]

These new friends were very welcome to her. She had sometimes feared "that old friends will die off, while I shall be left without the power to make new ones." But the growth of new friendships[3] did not by any means make the old less precious.

There are still friendly letters to the Brays, with little phrenological details concerning, for example, the "anterior lobes" of Dickens and Professor Owen. Marian's interest in phrenology seems to have been sincere and serious, though not ardent; it would probably have faded away very soon but for the Brays and Combes. Now it seems as odd as Mrs. Browning's interest in spiritualism, but then it was taken much more seriously even by intellectual people than it is to-day. To the Brays went also many an amusing little anecdote or saying of the notable people she met.

[1] The tie between her and Mme. Belloc seems to have been one of pure affection rather than of intellectual sympathy, but it was no less pleasant and dear for that. Mrs. Peter Taylor was a frequent correspondent to the end of George Eliot's life. She was one of the few who "showed her kindness in word or deed" at a crucial point of her life—the commencement of her union with Lewes. She wrote to her then with "generous consideration and belief," though their acquaintance was only short and but moderately intimate. Marian was most grateful for that kind letter, and it probably formed the basis of their enduring friendship. At the time when they first met she lived in a pretty, airy house at Sydenham, which Marian found very attractive. The third, Mme. Bodichon, was the one of the three who was in most complete sympathy with their common friend. She seemed at once to recognise the motives of any act or speech, and when the marriage with Mr. Cross took place, George Eliot felt that of all her friends, Mme. Bodichon was the one who would most readily understand her. A certain proof of the closeness of the sympathy between the two is the fact that while the old friends at Rosehill failed to recognise the familiar Marian behind "George Eliot," Mme. Bodichon, on reading only a few extracts from *Adam Bede*, wrote a joyful letter of praise and congratulation to her, about whose identity with the author she felt no doubt. A friendship formed on such thorough, sympathetic understanding could not fail to be a source of deep and ever-fresh pleasure to one who yearned for sympathy so keenly as did George Eliot.

[2] "Dorothea Casaubon and George Eliot," *Contemporary Review*, Feb., 1894.

[3] It is curious to note that nearly all her friends outlived her. The Brays and Miss Hennell and Spencer did so by a number of years, and Miss Sibree died only this year (1912).

Her love for Mrs. Bray and Miss Hennell was far too deep and sincere to be injured by the making of new friends, and one of her letters to Sara gives full utterance—as she loved to do—to her feeling. "If there is any change in my affection for you it is that I love you more than ever, not less. I have as perfect a friendship for you as my imperfect nature can feel—a friendship in which deep respect and admiration are sweetened by a sort of flesh-and-blood sisterly feeling and the happy consciousness that I have your affection, however undeservedly, in return. I have confidence that this friendship can never be shaken; that it must last while I last, and that the supposition of its ever being weakened by a momentary irritation is too contemptibly absurd for me to take the trouble to deny it. . . . It is impossible that I should ever love two women better than I love you and Sara. Indeed, it seems to me that I can never have any friend—not even a husband—who would supply the loss of those associations with the past which belong to you. Do believe in my love for you, and that it will remain as long as I have my senses, because it is interwoven with my best nature, and is dependent, not on any accidents of manner, but on long experience, which has confirmed the instinctive attraction of earlier days."[1]

This letter is noteworthy, not only as a tender expression of friendship by one to whom friendship was particularly necessary and sweet, but also in relation to the great test by which the writer was soon to try the love and understanding of her friends. The group of loved ones at Rosehill were especially precious to her when she felt miserable, for they always listened to her complaints with sympathy. The hard work, fogs, and bad weather of all sorts tried her spirits thoroughly. "Let me grumble," she pleads, sitting miserably at her desk in dismal, foggy weather, shattered by a spell of headache. Ill-health was now and ever after one of her chief troubles, and she regarded it as "the one woe for which there is no comfort, no compensation." She could only make the best of it, and where there was no best, go to her friends for help. "Do write to me, dear Sara," she cries again, "I want comforting. This world looks ugly just now; all people rather worse than I have been used to think them. Put me in love with my kind again by giving me a glimpse of your own inward self, since I cannot see the outer one."

These pleadings for help and comfort are seldom heard again, for presently there came a change by which the sympathy and cheering that she valued most of all were ever at hand.

The strain of work was relieved by several pleasant visits, some to the Brays and one to Miss Martineau. There were

[1] Cross, pp. 144-45.

also two or three to Meriden, where her sister lived, these last saddened by the recent death of Chrissey's husband, Dr. Clarke. Marian, as one might expect, at once and willingly took up her part in this misfortune, joining in the family council, and considering ways of economy by which she might help her sister.

Editorial work, callers, concerts, holidays, and sisterly cares might well have engrossed her time and energy; yet during these first years in London she translated, or finished translating, Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christentums*.[1]

It is impossible to say when she first read this work. For the last few years—since before her father's death—philosophy had been more and more rarely discussed in her letters. Of course, the new experiences of Geneva and London, and the full occupation of her days by work or pleasure, would go far to account for this. The Brays were evidently cognisant of her work at the translation, but she did not write about it as she had been accustomed to write about the Strauss. There is no mention of it until November, 1853, when it was finished, nor is there anything to suggest that it had made any impression on her; the letters are written, most of them, too hurriedly for talk on such subjects. We cannot then say with certainty whether Feuerbach helped to prepare her mind for Comte or whether she became acquainted with both writers about the same time.[2]

Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* was an important contribution to religious philosophy. The writer approached the problem of Christianity from quite a different direction than that of Strauss. "While Strauss, like Hegel, was mainly occupied with the *content* of dogma, Feuerbach sought to discover the *source* of dogmas in human feelings and impulses, fears and hopes, longings and wishes."[3]

He declares that man can imagine nothing higher than humanity, that therefore his God is himself, or rather, what he aspires to be, and longs for. "Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul." "Such as are a man's thoughts and dispositions such is his God." Man puts together the highest attributes of humanity and calls the total "God," making Him good and loving because that is the highest he knows. Feuerbach shows at length how the Christian God—that is of the age of the Apostles—fulfils all that man could desire in God, having been gradually shaped by Him to meet his own needs

[1] This translation appeared in Chapman's Quarterly Series in July, 1854, with the name "Marian Evans" on the title-page. See note to page 10.

[2] There is mention of Comte in the article she wrote before leaving Rosehill, but not sufficiently definite to prove that she was reading his works.

[3] Höffding, *History of Modern Philosophy*, vol. ii., p. 273.

and longings. He shows that it is possible to account satisfactorily for the existence of religion purely from psychological grounds. He cannot, of course, *prove* that "all theology is psychology" and nothing more. Like Comte, he admires Catholicism rather than later Protestantism. He treats the early Christianity and all religion that he considers original and genuine with respect, even with sympathy, but has little tolerance for the Christianity of the modern world, calling it "dissolute," "characterless," "coquettish."

But belief in a personal God, even such as the God of the Christians, has serious and undesirable consequences, for once believed in, He must also be honoured. Man exalted goodness and love above God by insisting that God should possess these attributes; but, having projected his God out of himself, he believes in Him, and demands that He shall be acknowledged and worshipped by others; he puts faith above love, hence fanaticism and persecution, hence all the gloom of Calvinism, hence also the notion of Hell. Good is done for a wrong end—to gratify a being who needs nothing—instead of for the sake of man, who alone could benefit by it. Feuerbach admits that man gets some help, as extension of view, from religion; but, on the other hand, being satisfied that in God he possesses all, he has therefore less impulse towards family affections and culture; his need for them is less; and so the progress of the race is hindered. Feuerbach regards human love as the means by which man comes to perceive the unity of the race.

He tells us that the "theogonic wish" that gave God being is not present in the Christian religion of to-day. Since, then, religion is no longer alive, it must be put aside as an encumbrance. The necessary turning-point of history is "the confession that the consciousness of God is nothing else than the consciousness of the species."

I have not given such an account of this book as a philosopher would have done. I must needs be brief, and it seemed best to regard chiefly its practical import, as that is what mattered most to its translator. Very gradually the early love of speculation in her was being absorbed by the much stronger desire for practical good. The circle of London acquaintances and the reading of Feuerbach and Comte furnished a fresh and strong impulse to this development.

The two philosophers had much in common. Höffding says that a longing for satisfaction of soul drove Feuerbach "first to theology and afterwards to philosophy, and—within philosophy itself—from the speculative philosophy to a standpoint, almost identical with the one already established by Comte under the name of Positivism."[1] "He regarded himself

[1] *History of Modern Philosophy*, vol. ii., p. 272.

as a Positivist thinker." Like Comte, he refused to accept anything for which there was not plain warrant, and regarded thought as subservient to life. Both agreed in attaching importance to family love as a means of attaining to the more difficult and unselfish social love, and both earnestly taught that the "chief end" of each individual man is the progress and well-being of humanity, not personal happiness or salvation, or the glorification of a being outside humanity. The French philosopher is mentioned several times in George Eliot's letters of this period in a way which shows that she has, at any rate, been dipping into his writings, but there is no sign of deep admiration or eager interest.

The study of Feuerbach had almost certainly something to do with her gradual change of attitude towards Christianity. Unfortunately, we cannot trace this change in her letters. At Geneva she had not lost the attitude of antagonism to her old faith, and we know that this has quite disappeared in the *Scenes*, so that it must have taken place between 1850 and 1856. Though some see bitterness in the article on Cumming, finished in August, 1855, a careful reading of that essay will show that her severity was not directed against real Christianity, but against an abominable caricature of it. Indeed, she there writes of the religion itself most tenderly and reverently, recognising not merely its dear associations, but its actual value in life.[1]

The translation of Feuerbach was finished in November, 1853, which leaves time enough for the change. I think that Feuerbach, by making religion a *human* thing, made it lovable to her; he showed it as meeting man's needs because it grew out of them; he made it appear not as a thing given to man or imposed on him, but a very part of him, and thus it was easy for her to extend her love to it also. As her own life became more full of sweetness, and she felt the joy of a loving, tender care surrounding her, she would grow more grateful for what had given comfort and hope to her weaker fellow-creatures, though she refused its aid for herself.

Some have supposed that Spencer had an important influence on her mind, but he himself denied it, saying in a letter which he caused to be published in several newspapers, "Our friendship did not commence until 1851 . . . when she was already distinguished by that breadth of culture and universality of power which have since made her known to all the world." The relations between them were simply those of two friends meeting on an equal footing, each with considerable liking and admiration for the other, not at all as teacher and pupil. It was probably of him that she wrote some twenty

[1] See, for instance, the passage on the moral idea of God. *Essays.* (This passage also bears distinct traces of Feuerbach.)

years later to Miss Eliz. Phelps: "I believe that every main bias of my mind had been taken before I knew him. Like the rest of his readers, I am, of course, indebted to him for much enlargement and clarifying of thought."[1]

Indeed, George Eliot's mind had reached maturity. There were to be no more great changes, only a gradual perfecting of the leading features of it—all of which were now formed—a quiet mellowing and beautifying without the pain and stress of struggle. Her critical and artistic powers, however, still needed exercise and development. It is instructive to notice what were her opinions at this time of her contemporary woman writers.

The natural, undisguised passion of *Jane Eyre* had rather startled her. She admitted the force of the book, but objected to the manner of speech of the characters; its openness and daring were new to her. It is not surprising that she was unable at first to give the book its rightful meed of praise; the first novel of passion in the English language could not at once win the full honour due to it from everyone, even of those inclined to be just and fair. Large, serious minds, moving with slow dignity, could not at once rightly approve the new phenomenon. By the time *Villette* appeared, however, George Eliot was ready with hearty admiration. She speaks of being only just returned to a sense of the real world about her after reading it, and says: "There is something almost preternatural in its power." She then proceeds with her letter, but at the end of it exclaims again, "*Villette! Villette!* Have you read it?" The next month (March, 1853) she writes: "Lewes was describing Currer Bell to me yesterday as a little, plain, provincial, sickly-looking old maid.[2] Yet what passion, what fire in her! Quite as much as in George Sand, only the clothing is less voluptuous."

Of Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth* she writes: "Its style was a great refreshment to me, from its finish and fulness. *Ruth*, with all its merits, will not be an enduring or classical fiction—will it? Mrs. Gaskell seems to me to be constantly misled by a love of sharp contrasts—of dramatic effects. She is not contented with the subdued colouring—the half-tints of real life. Hence she agitates one for the moment, but she does not secure one's lasting sympathy; her scenes and characters do not become typical. But how pretty and graphic are the touches of description! . . . Mrs. Gaskell has certainly a charming mind, and one cannot help loving her as one reads her books."[3]

This criticism strikes one still as very just, except that George Eliot has neglected to say that when Mrs. Gaskell does content herself with the "half-tints of real life," as in *Cranford*, she is

[1] *Harper's Magazine*, March, 1882.

[2] Rather careless of Lewes, as George Eliot might have considered that every epithet was applicable to her also.

[3] Cross, p. 158.

not easily surpassed in the representation of the particular tints which are her choice.

Miss Evans always found much to admire and respect in Harriet Martineau, though in later years some pleasure was taken out of her feeling towards the elder writer by that lady's peculiar temper. At this period, however, her admiration and liking were very hearty. She even declares to Mrs. Peter Taylor that Harriet Martineau is "the only Englishwoman that possesses thoroughly the art of writing."[1] Rather extravagant praise, but the poor sub-editor was just then "bothered to death with article-reading and scrap-work of all sorts," and Miss Martineau had written an excellent article for the *Review*.

By November, 1853, George Eliot was getting very tired of editorial work. It worried her dreadfully if she thought any number was going to be worse than those that had gone before; at times she would gladly have run away from it, and only consoled herself by thinking the *Review* would be a great deal worse if she were not there. On another occasion she gets into a rage over an exasperating article which is a great deal of trouble and of very little value, and would like to "stick red-hot skewers through the writer, whose style is as sprawling as his handwriting."

The greatest trouble was that all her time and strength were taken up by work which was for the most part mere drudgery. It was well enough for a time; she was patient and hard-working, but at last she began to revolt against this absorption by work in which her highest powers were almost unexercised. She had not been able to write anything of which she might be proud, and yet she felt that, under suitable circumstances, she could at least do something better than anything she had yet accomplished. During her sub-editorship she had not written a single article of any length. The only writing of this period known to be hers is the review of Carlyle's *Life of Stirling*,[2] though the short essay on Margaret Fuller in the following number is almost certainly from the same pen. The article on Carlyle's book is full of warm appreciation. This was just the kind of biography that satisfied her; she wished we had more such works "setting forth briefly and vividly the man's inward and outward struggles, aims and achievements, so as to make clear the meaning which his experience has for his fellows." Indeed, she has not a fault to find with it, and gives herself up with great relief to the much more congenial task of according praise. Carlyle's style, though so very different from her own, pleased her well. She calls it "for the most part at once pure and rich: there are passages of deep pathos which come upon the reader like a strain of solemn music."

[1] Cross, p. 147. [2] *West. Rev.*, January, 1852.

But there were books of a very different stamp to be read, and her patience was sometimes almost exhausted. Besides, the sense of the responsibility of her undertaking weighed on her, and in addition she found the task of criticism distasteful. She liked to take what a book had to offer, if it had a value for her, frankly and gratefully, letting the deficiencies pass out of sight unheeded. There was no pleasure for George Eliot in carefully discriminating between virtues and faults, and weighing them against each other; she "hated sitting in the seat of judgment," and thought one could get the best results from a book without necessarily forming an opinion about it.[1]

After a little more than two years' labour she wanted to have done with scrap-work, and in November, 1853, told Mr. Chapman that she wished to resign her post as sub-editor. He begged her, however, to continue for a few months longer, and she consented. Yet at times she was weary; the fame she had dreamed of ten years ago seemed as far away as ever—was, indeed, for ever inaccessible while the present state of things lasted. She was surrounded by the gloom of "self-dissatisfaction and despair of achieving anything worth the doing."[2] Yet her womanliness was stronger than all else, and these psychical troubles vanished at once before any fear for the happiness of those she loved.

As she tired of editorial work she tired of the Strand too, and in October, 1853, took rooms at 21, Cambridge Street, Hyde Park Square, a change which, besides removing her from the very thick of the rush and worry, made it easier for her to see as much of her particular friends as she wished.

[1] Letter to Miss Phelps, *Harper*, March, 1882.
[2] Letter to Mrs. Bray, May, 1854.

CHAPTER X.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES.

There was one friendship which ripened with great rapidity under these new conditions. When Mr. George Henry Lewes was first introduced to George Eliot she was not greatly impressed in his favour; he seemed to her, as to many others, brilliant and charming, but rather wild and superficial. He was then thirty-four years of age, and had tried many professions before he at last half-drifted into that of literature. He was the grandson of an actor, and all his experience had tended to make him a Bohemian. After school he had been a clerk in a merchant's office. Wearying of this he became a medical student about the same time that his interest in philosophy grew keen. When he was nineteen he joined a small club which met weekly in Holborn for the discussion of philosophy and metaphysics.[1] All kinds of thoughtful men from various classes of society met there, and among them was a Jewish watchmaker, poor, ailing, but possessed of unusual mental power and personal charm, who was an earnest admirer of Spinoza, and made his writings known to Lewes. The latter was but twenty years of age when he gave a course of lectures on philosophy at the chapel of W. J. Fox. After this he spent some years in France and Germany, studying the literature and philosophy of both countries. On his return to England, or a little later, he yielded to the fascination the theatre always had for him and became an actor. He acted Shylock at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, in March, 1849, to the great disgust of Barry Sullivan, who resented playing Bassanio to the philosopher-amateur-actor's Shylock. The criticisms of Lewes's performance would lead anyone to think, as Mr. William Archer says,[2] that his conception of Shylock in many ways anticipated that of Sir Henry Irving. He also appeared at Manchester in the next month in the part of Don Gomez in his own play, *The Noble Heart.*

Very soon, however, he gave himself up to literature. During the time when he was making the acquaintance of Marian Evans

[1] This club is said to have furnished some of the details for the one in *Daniel Deronda.*

[2] *Dramatic Essays by John Forster and George Henry Lewes.* Edited by Wm. Archer and Robt. W. Lowe; Introduction, p. 18.

he was writing nonsense and dramatic criticism in the *Leader* under the name of "Vivian," and publishing his philosophical work in the same paper under his own name.

His taste in literature was as all-embracing as in everything else. He wrote plays, novels, articles on French and German philosophy, on English poets, and on Greek, Spanish, Italian and English drama. As a critic he had more sympathy than most English writers with French canons of taste, but was exceedingly independent in his opinions, and frankly preferred modern drama to most Elizabethan plays.[1] One of his novels, *Rose, Blanche, and Violet*, was much read, while the other, *Ranthorpe*, won sincere praise from Charlotte Brontë and Edgar Poe, though it never became popular. His greatest work before he met Marian was his *Biographical History of Philosophy*, published in 1845 and 1846. This book was greatly valued by his contemporaries and the next generation. Philosophy had never before been presented to Englishmen in so interesting and attractive a form, and it was very pleasant to read a history of philosophy and grow learned while one was being charmed by the bright companionship of a mind like Lewes's. The writer's attitude, however, is that of a devoted disciple of Comte, and this makes him somewhat lacking in reverence to metaphysics. He declares that this is now a thing of the past, and all the future of philosophy lies with Positivism. This, of course, so colours his work as to render it less valuable than it otherwise would have been; it is not sufficiently impartial. Besides this, his acquaintance with philosophy was not deep and scholastic enough to render him capable of producing a work of permanent value on such a subject. In 1853 he published *Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences*, a collection of papers that had appeared in the *Leader*. It was not until after his union with George Eliot that he completed his *Life of Goethe*, which, though it had some difficulty in getting itself published, became a great success, and is still regarded by many as a standard work in biography. He wrote a great deal for various reviews, and at this time was a contributor to the *Athenæum*, the *Edinburgh*, *Blackwood*, *Fraser*, the *Westminster Review* and others, besides being editor of the *Leader*, a weekly paper representing the same advanced thought as the *Westminster*. Later in life he became interested in physiology, an interest shared by George Eliot, and wrote his *Physiology of Common Life*, *Studies in Animal Life*, and *Problems of Life and Mind*. So great was his enthusiasm for this subject that after his death it seemed to George Eliot that the most fitting memorial of him would be a studentship in physiological research. One was therefore founded by her and called "The George Henry Lewes Student-

[1] *Dictionary of National Biography*, "George Henry Lewes."

ship." It will be seen that his literary work was as varied as Goldsmith's, and if it could not be said of him quite as truthfully as of "poor Goldie" that "he touched nothing that he did not adorn," neither could it be said that he "talked like poor Poll." Lewes was a most brilliant talker, indeed "brilliant" is the word that no writer fails to use when describing him. He was of a bright, vivacious disposition, with happy faith in himself and a generous readiness to admire worth and power in others. No one was more welcome than he at social gatherings, for he was one of those wonderful people who can keep a whole roomful of visitors interested or amused. In the later days of his life he had full scope for this delightful gift in the Sunday gatherings at the Priory, for George Eliot found it difficult to talk to more than one or two persons at once.

In appearance, temperament and manners he suggested something un-English. One sees in Will Ladislaw certain traits—defiance of conventionality, versatility of talent, brightness of manner and so on, which suggest Mr. Lewes. The latter was "a lightly-built, fragile man with bushy, curly hair . . . a prominent mouth, and grey, deeply-set eyes under an ample, finely-proportioned forehead. . . . Volatile by nature, somewhat wild and lawless in his talk, he in turn delighted and shocked his friends by the gaiety, recklessness and genial abandon of his manners and conversation."[1]

It is said that Thackeray once declared that it would not surprise him to meet Lewes riding on a white elephant in Piccadilly.[2] He had other and more admirable qualities than these, however, for he was capable of deep seriousness, strong sympathy and warm devotion, as George Eliot proved for herself.

Lewes had married, in 1840, a "pretty, rosebud-like" lady named Agnes Jervis, and had settled in Kensington, where they formed part of a merry group of friends of both sexes. In the same house was living Thornton Hunt, his co-editor of the *Leader*, between whom and Mrs. Lewes an intimacy grew until she deserted her husband and their three sons for his sake. After a while she repented and Lewes forgave her, but the passion was too strong and she left him a second time, declaring this to be her final choice.[3] A divorce was impossible, but the home was broken up and his "family life irretrievably spoiled." All this was two years before the union with George Eliot.

[1] M. Blind, p. 84.

[2] Swinburne did not admire him. He says so somewhat emphatically, even for him, when he speaks of "the chattering duncery and impudent malignity of so consummate and pseudo-sophical a quack as G. H. Lewes."—Article on Dickens, *Quarterly*, 196, p. 35.

[3] *The True Story of George Eliot*, by William Mottram, p. 271.

It was probably during the course of these troubles that Lewes came to know Spencer, of whom he writes in 1854: "I owe him a debt of gratitude. My acquaintance with him was the brightest ray in a very dreary *wasted* period of my life. I had given up all ambition whatever, lived from hand to mouth, and thought the evil of each day sufficient. The stimulus of his intellect, especially during our long walks, roused my energy once more and revived my dormant love of science. His intense theorising tendency was contagious, and it was only the stimulus of a *theory* which could then have induced me to work. I owe Spencer another and a deeper debt. It was through him that I learned to know Marian—to know her was to love her—and since then my life has been a new birth. To her I owe all my prosperity and all my happiness. God bless her!"[1]

George Eliot was at first somewhat startled by his exuberant spirits and unusual flow of gay and amusing conversation. He seemed rather lacking in gravity and earnest purpose; but as she came to know him better, she found that his liveliness did not at all interfere with the nobler traits of character. Early in March, 1853, she confesses: "He has quite won my liking, in spite of myself," and a little later, "Mr. Lewes especially is kind and attentive and has quite won my regard, after having had a good deal of my vituperation. Like a few other people in the world he is much better than he seems—a man of heart and conscience wearing a mask of flippancy."[2]

When she had once made this discovery their friendship grew apace. His name appears very often in her letters, as having given an opinion on this or that, or simply in the friendly chit-chat *apropos* of nothing.

In the spring of 1854, when Marian had removed to Cambridge Street, Lewes was ill, and she took up some of his work in addition to her own, though that was already heavy.

How the arrangement was approached that brought them finally together will probably never be known. They did not act on a momentary impulse; indeed, the decision was made some time before it was acted upon. Several weeks before she and Lewes left London she communicated her intention to Miss Bessie Parkes, as they strolled together in Hyde Park. Her friend was startled and distressed, but knew at once that remonstrance was useless.[3] The mutual attraction was evidently strong. Lewes saw in Marian a woman of tender, pure, upright nature, full of pity and helpfulness, and possessed of great, though serious, charm; and she found Lewes to be one in whom she could put her trust without any wavering doubt, one peculiarly fitted to cheer and encourage her and incite her

[1] Cross, p. 259. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 160.
[3] "Dorothea Casaubon and George Eliot," *Contemp. Rev.*, Feb., 1894.

to her best. Their temperaments were complements to each other. He needed the restful quiet of her large nature, she the bright hope and courage of his. Each, too, found deep joy in their ability to contribute so much to the happiness of each other.

It is hardly necessary to discuss the ethics of this union. What is quite certain is that both of them thought the matter over most earnestly before the decision was made; that neither ever doubted that they were justified in their action, and that it seemed to them as the most sacred of marriages, growing in holiness and priceless sweetness during all the years that followed. It is to be remembered that this union caused no pain and did no injustice to anyone concerned. To the three boys it was a great blessing, and Mr. C. L. Lewes always acknowledged most willingly his gratitude and affection towards her. If it be held that a man who acts according to his conscience is justified, then these must be held free from blame. They did not suddenly discover the marriage laws too strict at the moment in which they desired to break them, but had disapproved their rigidity even before they knew each other.

In the early days at Coventry, Marian was of the opinion that the stringency of the laws relating to marriage worked injuriously, for the somewhat one-sided, Miltonian reason that "many wives took far less pains to please their husbands in behaviour and appearance, because they knew their own position to be invulnerable." She preferred the continental marriage laws, which made separation possible. It seemed to her a very terrible thing to find oneself tied to a person whose mind and character were ever appearing less and less in harmony with one's own.

On reading *Jane Eyre* in 1848 she had objected that self-sacrifice was wasted in the case of Rochester, and thought he ought to have been legally free to marry again.

In defying conventional laws Marian was then doing no violence to her conscience; still, as long as there is a publicly recognised system of morality everyone must be prepared to obey it or take the consequences of rebellion without murmuring. George Eliot fully realised this, and so far as public opinion was concerned, submitted to its quick condemnation without any attempt at excuse or evasion, and offered no angry resentment in return. No one ever recognised more clearly than she—not even Comte himself—the sanctity of those bonds and obligations on which social order depends. In all her books she treats with even more than due reverence the duty of faithfully observing these bonds, and seems strongly to deprecate the breaking away from almost any tie by which birth has bound us, whether of position, race, or family. Yet, though all her inclination draws her in that direction, those who say

she acted in opposition to all her teaching do her less than justice. She recognised that sometimes rebellion is permissible, becomes a duty even, but she did not think that the world needed that lesson so much as the lesson of faithfulness or constancy, and a noble exclusion of any self-regard in her writing made her choose to teach that doctrine by which her enemies, if such there were, might most readily condemn her. Perhaps she taught it all the more earnestly because of its apparent discordance with her own action. There was no spirit of pride in this, no flinging down of the gauntlet, but just a quiet putting aside of everything personal and a whole-hearted devotion to her work as artist and teacher.

I think this attitude is the very noblest one she could have taken. She might easily have defended herself or treated those broken ties with that cool indifference which does much more to cheapen them than downright assault could. Her entire disregard of self has caused some ungenerous or obstinate critics to say that her books are a repentance and an atonement for her fault. She never called her action a fault, never repented it, never wished to atone for it. Perhaps if she had known that she was to become a famous woman, standing in the fierce light of publicity, she might, as a public character, have hesitated over what seemed quite justifiable to a private person; but I doubt it. She knew that a wrong use was made of her example, and had satisfaction in thinking that the good in her books outweighed the evil that was somewhat unfairly charged on her acts, but she never thought of her deed as one that needed an atonement.

So she went on, calmly defending the ties which, in the eyes of many, she had seemed to disregard.

Once or twice in her writings, however, she has admitted that there is a point at which bonds become unbearable, dishonourable, and are to be broken. When Romola first left Tito, George Eliot makes Savonarola send her back, urging that her duty lies in her own town, and with her husband, whatever the difficulties of their union. The priest's words are simple but unrelenting: "My daughter, every bond of your life is a debt; the right lies in the payment of that debt; it can be nowhere else."

But there comes a time when Tito's baseness is all laid bare. It is just after Romola becomes aware of the relation between him and Tessa that the following passage occurs: 'She felt . . . that the light abandonment of ties, whether inherited or voluntary, because they had ceased to be pleasant, was the uprooting of social and personal virtue. . . . And the inspiring consciousness breathed into her by Savonarola's influence that her lot was vitally united with the general lot had exalted even the minor details of obligation into

religion. . . . The law was sacred. Yes, but rebellion might be sacred too. It flashed upon her mind that the problem before her was essentially the same as that which had lain before Savonarola—the problem where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion began. To her, as to him, there had come one of those moments in life when the soul must dare to act on its own warrant, not only without external law to appeal to, but in the face of a law which is not unarmed with Divine lightenings—lightenings that may yet fall if the warrant has been false."[1] When one more act of treachery is added to her husband's account she flies again, and this time George Eliot has no word of reproof; she sanctions the act of rebellion.

It is clear that she thought her own case one in which she must act on her own warrant, and she did it fearlessly, yet without any diminution of respect for the social bonds that, under the circumstances, she felt she had a right to break.

The penalty, however, was even severer than she expected; the recriminations of society she received calmly, if sadly; the alienation of many old acquaintances at Griff and Coventry was a thing that could be borne; even to the loss of brotherly and sisterly affection she bowed her head, with keen pain it is true, yet fully understanding the natures that found it impossible to make exception to their rules of life; who lived by principle and not by charity, but never pretended to do any other. This stern, unbending type of mind she knew well; valued, too, as one sees in her treatment of Tom Tulliver, in spite of the harshness it showed her: she expected no merciful constructions from Tullivers and Dodsons, nor did she receive any. To this day one can find within a few miles of Griff those who remember their parents' stern condemnation of her action, and who cannot even yet bring themselves to think of her with tolerance and kindliness.

It was, however, with some surprise that she found the Brays and Miss Hennell also unable to understand and believe in her. The friendship, which she thought too well-founded, too open-eyed ever to be injured, seemed likely to become a thing of the past. It is strange that one with so deep a reverence for natural and social bonds, and so warm an affection for old-accustomed ways and manners and people, should twice have found herself figuring before her friends and kindred as a daring rebel. Yet rebellion and defiance were repugnant to her, and her pain was the greater because she was unsupported by any glowing feeling of opposition. Her nature was so complex, composed of so many widely-differing, seemingly contradictory tendencies, inextricably woven together—she

[1] *Romola*, Book III., lvi.

clung so firmly to the old, and longed so ardently to advance with the new, that, with the innate necessity of acting out her beliefs, it would have been stranger still if her life had been free from either outer or inner conflict. It was some time before Mrs. Bray and Miss Hennell could yield again to the old affectionate regard. For a year or more their letters were few and somewhat constrained, but at last Marian poured out her mind in a letter to Mrs. Bray, and after much pain and misunderstanding the friendship was restored.

It is fitting that George Eliot should speak for herself on this matter, therefore part of her letter to Mrs. Bray is here quoted: "If there is any one action or relation of my life which is and always has been profoundly serious, it is my relation to Mr. Lewes. It is, however, natural enough that you should mistake me in many ways, for not only are you unacquainted with Mr. Lewes's real character and the course of his actions, but also it is several years now since you and I were much together, and it is possible that the modifications my mind has undergone may be quite in the opposite direction of what you imagine. No one can be better aware than yourself that it is possible for two people to hold different opinions on momentous subjects with equal sincerity, and an equally earnest conviction that their respective opinions are alone the truly moral ones. If we differ on the subject of the marriage laws, I at least can believe of you that you cleave to what you believe to be good; and I don't know of anything in the nature of your views that should prevent you from believing the same of me. *How far* we differ, I think we neither of us know, for I am ignorant of your precise views, and apparently you attribute to me both feelings and opinions which are not mine. We cannot set each other quite right in this matter in letters, but one thing I can tell you in few words. Light and easily broken ties are what I neither desire theoretically nor could live for practically. Women who are satisfied with such ties do *not* act as I have done. That any unworldly, unsuperstitious person who is sufficiently acquainted with the realities of life can pronounce my relation to Mr. Lewes immoral, I can only understand by remembering how subtle and complex are the influences that mould opinion. But I *do* remember this; and I indulge in no arrogant or uncharitable thoughts about those who condemn us, even though we might have expected a different verdict. From the majority of persons, of course, we never looked for anything but condemnation. We are leading no life of self-indulgence, except indeed that, being happy in each other, we find everything easy. We are working hard to provide for others better than we provide for ourselves, and to fulfil every responsibility that lies upon us. Levity and pride would not be a sufficient basis for that. Pardon me if, in vindicating

myself from some unjust conclusions, I seem too cold and self-asserting. I should not care to vindicate myself if I did not love you and desire to relieve you of the pain which you say these conclusions have given you. Whatever I may have misinterpreted before, I do not misinterpret your letter this morning, but read in it nothing else than love and kindness towards me, to which my heart fully answers yes. I should like never to write about myself again; it is not healthy to dwell on one's own feelings and conduct, but only to try and live more faithfully and lovingly every fresh day."[1]

Mr. Lewes and Marian left London for Weimar on July 20th, 1854. Their union was perfectly happy and satisfactory, and never did either of them have reason to regret it. They had to work hard, as Marian says in the letter just quoted from, for they had to provide for the support of Mrs. Lewes and her three sons, but they worked willingly and gladly, finding strength for the additional toil in the happiness which their love and confidence in each other brought.

Lord Acton has said that in joining Lewes she sacrificed "liberty of speech, the foremost rank among the women of her time, and a tomb in Westminster Abbey."[2] But liberty of speech she bravely kept, in spite of all difficulties and dangers; the foremost rank among women of her time she had, but probably would not have had except for Lewes; and the tomb in Westminster Abbey might possibly have been denied her simply as a non-Christian, though I do not think the expectation of that would have caused her much regret.

[1] Cross, pp. 169-70. [2] In *Essays on Modern History.*

CHAPTER XI

WEIMAR AND BERLIN, 1854—1855.

George Eliot's gains from these three years in London were neither few nor mean. They included several precious friendships, one of which resulted in a relation which lasted for some twenty-four years, bringing with it the deepest joy and noblest work of her life. The experience as sub-editor of the *Westminster* had been of great value by bringing her in touch with many fresh minds and making her thoroughly acquainted with the current literature in its wholeness. It was good for her to know the kinds of books, fiction and other, that were issued, and to see more clearly for herself what manner of literature the public fed upon. Her acquaintance with many new people, especially her environment of literary men and women, made the old memories of Griff to stand out the more clearly by contrast. We never can know an object well unless we have the opportunity to compare and contrast it with others of a not totally dissimilar kind. George Eliot could never have known so well what features of the lovingly remembered country people to select, what was essential, what distinctive, what would be at once imagined, and what must be carefully and minutely drawn to make them live again for those who had never known them, if she had not got apart from them, and among people of very different ways of life and thought. A very few words would have sufficed to call up an image of those simple natures in her mind, but much more was necessary for London readers: what was unfamiliar to them could only be made known by a wise description, a description made by one who knew country people and towns-people equally well, and had fully realised the points of similarity and difference between them.

Her mind, as I have said, was now fully formed. At the time of her union with Lewes she was a woman of thirty-four years, looking out on life with a steady, earnest gaze, already determined to "do without opium" and to live through all its pains with "conscious, clear-eyed endurance." She was as passionately indignant as ever against cruelty, treachery, hypocrisy and sham, eager to burn them up with the fire of her words. A little more patient, a little more able to endure the thought of compromise than in former days, she had learnt the lesson that many find so hard—that the world is not ready at any moment to throw over the old and bad for the sake of the

new and good. Her mercifulness and tolerance spread wider, and she became more and more confirmed in her practical views of life.

Further acquaintance with great men had convinced her, if she needed further convincing, that for her there could be no mighty leader in life to whom she might look for guidance in every matter, to whom she could submit herself without any reserve. Perhaps this recognition made her somewhat severe on those who set up as guides in life without a high knowledge and capability. We shall see from her essays that there had grown in her a strong suspicion and impatience of would-be prophets. When she has to deal with such she speaks in a quick, didactic, confident fashion; expresses herself strongly with few qualifying phrases of "I think" or "It seems to me."

This touch of arrogance—if one may call it so—is a special mark of this phase of her development: it is scarcely ever to be noticed in her novels, though even there, when she on rare occasions takes up the whip of correction, she uses it with a will. To some extent she may be said to be didactic throughout; indeed, she always looked on herself as a teacher, though first and chief of all, an artist.

She had proved to herself, too, that this business of editorship was none of her work. It seemed that she must arrive at a knowledge of her powers by a process of elimination, and here was another possible employment tried and struck out as unsatisfactory. Impossible for one with a strong, though only half-recognised, half-admitted impulse to create, to content herself for long with the mere clipping and trimming of other men's work. That intensely living self must get itself expressed somehow—not, however, by correcting proofs and the like. The unrest which grew again upon her at the end of the editing period was not annihilated by the new arrangement of her life; it was only made more bearable by the help of sympathy and the infusion of hope. From the moment of her departure with Lewes, if not earlier, she was free from the work that had become so irksome. In the near future she would translate Spinoza's *Ethics* and write articles for the *Review* instead of merely correcting them or touching them up.

Marian's second visit to the Continent was made under very different conditions from the first. Then she was ill and miserable; the chief human tie that bound her to earth was broken; there was no home in the world which was especially hers, no duty that belonged to her and her only. Now she went with hope and joy, not altogether unmingled with pain, but far more interfused with gratitude that a real woman's duty was given to her, and that her life was once more closely bound with that of another loved being. For her, human ties were not only sacred, they were dearly beloved.

The route chosen was quite a new one to her. Two or three weeks were spent in Antwerp, Cologne and Coblentz, and some time in August they reached the interesting town of Weimar, where they stayed till October. George Eliot found the home of Schiller and Goethe a fascinating place. Her article in *Fraser's Magazine* tells how her first impression, which was rather disappointing, quickly gave place to a real affection for the town. This article shows also how well developed her faculty of description already was—though her power does not strike one nearly so much here as when she is dealing with the familiar scenery of her childhood and girlhood. Then there is also a tenderness which lies gently on the scene, beautifying it like the sunshine of a late September afternoon. Her affection for Weimar, real though it was, is insignificant compared with this deep-rooted love.

Though the charm of kinship with that which she describes is not present in *Three Months in Weimar*, and though the essay certainly does not impress one as an undoubted work of genius, there is much that is attractive in the observations of an artist's mind. Her eye is keen for every loveliness of tree and stream and flower; for the sunshine on the grass, for every beautiful or interesting effect of a building. Of course, the literary reminiscences of the town were among its chief charms for her. Unlike Lamb, who tossed the leaves from near Virgil's tomb carelessly into the street, she loved every place and object connected with the memory of great men whom she admired. The sight of the "precious relics"—"Luther's gown, the coat in which Gustavus Adolphus was shot, and Goethe's Court coat and Schlafrock"—brought a "rush of thoughts," and she could only look at Goethe's study "through a mist of rising tears," her breathing deepening with emotion.

The essay contains several of those beautiful figures with which she was wont to adorn her work. I think the best of them is that in which she speaks of sitting by a rock listening to "those delicate sounds which one might fancy came from tiny bells worn on the garment of Silence to make us aware of her invisible presence."[1]

From the date of her departure from England, her journal becomes available, and from it we get another side of her life at Weimar and Berlin. The extracts which Mr. Cross has chosen are chiefly concerned with the people they met, though there is also a fair amount of description, with sentences here and there closely resembling, as might be expected, some of those in the *Essays*.

The personality that impressed her most was that of Liszt. She had the pleasure not only of seeing him conduct and hearing him play, but also of getting to know him a little

[1] *Essays*, p. 241. References are to the Cabinet edition.

Her description of him, limited as it had to be by their slight acquaintance, makes an excellent little character-sketch, the best to be found so far in her writing. The old hero-worship was reanimated by this contact with a man of genius, character, and personal charm. She hesitated to decide whether he made a nobler picture when glowing with inspiration at the piano, or in Scheffer's painting, where he is represented as the youngest of the three Magi, the first to discern the herald star. The idea of Scheffer, as she said, was sublime, but the artist's work fell short of the original.

In November they left Weimar, with its pleasant associations and friends and "beloved park," and went to Berlin. Marian was not at all charmed with that city; she found it in appearance dull and uninteresting, but she met many people there whom she thoroughly enjoyed. Many a little character-sketch is strewn about in her *Recollections*, sketches which give one a better idea of her keen interest in character and vigilant observation even than her letters from Geneva. Among those she met were Varnhagen, Fanny Lewald, Edward Magnus the portrait painter, Professor Stahr, Rauch the sculptor, Johannes Müller, and Dr. Vehser. She rarely mentions any new acquaintance without giving some account of his personality.

Perhaps the most interesting of these sketches is that of Professor Gruppe. I give it to show the thoroughness with which she notices every detail which will help to produce a faithful picture both of the outer and inner man. It is a fair type of a number of such descriptions.

"A still more interesting acquaintance" [than Fräulein Solmar] "was Professor Gruppe, who has written great books on the Greek drama and on Philosophy; has been a political writer; is a lyric and epic poet; has invented a beautiful kind of marbled paper for binding books; is an enthusiastic huntsman, and withal the most simple, kind-hearted creature in the world. His little wife, who is about thirty years younger than himself, seems to adore him, and it is charming to see the group they and their two little children make in their dwelling up endless flights of stairs in the Leipziger Platz. Very pleasant evenings we had there, chatting or playing whist, or listening to readings of Gruppe's poems. We used to find him in a grey cloth *Schlafrock*, which I fancy was once a greatcoat, and a brown velvet cap surmounting his thin grey hairs. I never saw a combination at all like that which makes up Gruppe's character. Talent, fertility and versatility, that seem to indicate a fervid temperament, and yet no scintillation of all this in his talk and manner; on the contrary, he seems slow at apprehending other people's ideas, and is of an almost childish naïveté in the value he attaches to poor jokes and other trivialities."[1]

[1] Cross, pp. 180-81.

Of course it is only a small part of a novelist's power which is exercised in such descriptions. George Eliot's finest work lay, not in depicting a character as it might be known by any keenly observant and sympathetic person who knew the subject for a brief space of time, but in showing a nature in relation to other natures, in life and growth; and in following those subtle changes which are imperceptible to an ordinary friend. In her grandest creations we not only see this nature from the outside, but we go right down into its depths, learn to know it even better than it knows itself.

She preserved many rich stories of celebrated men which she heard in Weimar and Berlin, mostly those which were character-revealing, or showed some rare flash of insight, or contained some fine expression of wit. There occurs one instance of that severity which characterised some of her reviews. Speaking of a splendid marble monument of the late King of Hanover, which she saw in Rauch's studio, she says: "Pitiable that genius and spotless white marble should be thrown away on such human trash."[1]

"Those were very happy months we spent in Berlin," she afterwards wrote. They enjoyed the pleasant and very varied company they had; they appreciated occasional visits to the play, the opera and concerts, but perhaps what they delighted in most of all were the long winter evenings frequently spent in dual solitude, when they drank coffee and read Shakspere, Goethe, Heine and Macaulay, "with German *Pfefferkuchen* (gingerbread) and *Semmels* (rolls) at the end to complete the *noctes cenoeque deûm*." They read a great deal together, chiefly German and English literature, including a good many of Shakspere's plays. George Eliot seems from this time to have taken a greater interest in the literature of criticism than formerly, which is, of course, largely due to the influence of Mr. Lewes.

In spite of much reading and visiting they worked hard. Mr. Lewes was completing his *Life of Goethe*. Marian continued her translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* and wrote two or three articles for the *Westminster*.

In March, 1855, they returned to England, glad to get back to "English mutton and an English fire," but looking on their eight months in Germany as a very happy time, and thinking with affection of the country and its people. George Eliot told Miss Hennell that she felt "much stronger and clearer in mind for the last eight months of new experience." It was during that stay abroad that she read to her husband an introductory chapter for a novel which she had written some time ago, and he "began to think that I might as well try some time what I could do in fiction." No result came of this, however, for over a year.

[1] Cross, p. 183.

CHAPTER XII.

PART I.

REVIEWS AND ESSAYS, 1855—1856.

The summer of 1855 was spent partly at London and partly at the seaside, but at the beginning of October Mr. and Mrs. Lewes (as she chose to be called) took rooms at 8, Park Shot, Richmond, where they lived for over three years. They could not afford separate studies, though "the scratching of another pen used to affect her nerves to such an extent that it nearly drove her wild." Strict economy and hard work were necessary in order to keep themselves and provide for Mr. Lewes's three sons and their mother, but they were fortunate in finding a ready acceptance of their work. One hears nothing of articles refused or even of any difficulties in placing them. George Eliot had charge of the "Belles Lettres" section of the *Westminster* from the middle of 1855, and she wrote several articles for the *Review*.

"I keep the purse," she wrote to Mr. Bray a little later, "and dole out sovereigns with all the pangs of a miser. In fact, if you were to feel my bump of acquisitiveness, I daresay you would find it in a state of inflammation, like the 'veneration' of that clergyman to whom Mr. Donovan said—'Sir, you have recently been engaged in prayer.'"[1]

It was natural that her interest in science should incline her to enter into Mr. Lewes's physiological studies with zest, although she had but little time to spare, and many other matters to occupy her mind. The days were usually spent in hard work, the evenings in reading aloud by turn, an occupation which was a great pleasure to her. Occasionally they varied their evenings by "very dramatic singing of *Figaro*," etc., which, George Eliot thought, "must alarm 'that good man the clergyman' who sits below us."

Her letters are now very bright and often amusing. Mr. Lewes was an ever-present exhortation to cheerfulness, and, besides, she was really much happier than she had ever been before. On the other hand, they lose some of their early interest by being almost altogether occupied with the external

[1] Cross, p. 199.

features of her life. She had determined never again to write on personal matters if it could possibly be avoided, because of the misunderstanding that so easily arises from a misconstrued phrase or sentence. No doubt her painful experience in her friendship with Mrs. Bray was the chief cause of this resolve.

Fortunately for our understanding of this important period of her life, we are able to watch the rapid development of her artistic power in her articles, the most important of which were written for the *Westminster* between 1851 and 1857. Mr. Oscar Browning and Sir Leslie Stephen have passed over this stage very briefly. Miss Blind has treated it at greater length, but her pages are chiefly occupied with copious transcription from the articles themselves. If we look at the latter with any attention we shall find that, taken altogether, they give us a view of George Eliot that differs both from that given by her letters and from the one we get by reading her books. In the novels we become aware of a mighty intellect, a large, all-sympathetic nature, which could never be found utterly unresponsive to any idea or object in the universe that was a matter of importance to any human individual; we see evidence of wide and varied learning and deep philosophic thought; we are impressed by the great calm of her mind, a calm which is not that of a small and placid lake but of a mighty ocean where terrible storms have but lately subsided—of a deeply passionate and sensitive nature which is master of itself. Above all, we feel stirred and exalted by the infinite pity and tenderness, the grave maternal love for all manner of human beings which sounds through all her novels till we seem to recognise it as her very voice.

Those letters we have so far considered show us a living, loving woman, clinging eagerly to every woman's duty, warmly attached to her friends, often suffering and lonely, mistrustful of herself and of the future, in desperate need of sympathetic help, exceedingly conscientious in all things, and with a deep-rooted love for truth and honesty and "whatsoever things are lovely."

In her articles we shall become acquainted with a new side of her character. At least we shall see strong light thrown on what was hitherto in the shade. Her hatred of all that is evil we knew beforehand rather by inference, but now we see her as judge and critic, laying bare impostures, inconsistencies, shams, and hypocrisies with unsparing justice; we hear words of glowing indignation, of biting satire, of fearless denunciation. Into the temple of humanity she enters as a daring reformer, unceremoniously overturning the table at which Cumming changed money and the seat where Young sat selling doves. To come from *The Mill on the Floss* to the article on *Worldliness and Other-Worldliness* gives one the same kind of shock

as to turn from the ordinary notion of St. John, the gentle and loving, and read that his Master surnamed him Boanerges.

Thus some of the long-pent-up thoughts and feelings got themselves expressed, with all the more energy, it may be, for their past silence. Something of the fire and abandon of these writings is surely due to the near presence of one who was used to expressing himself strongly and decisively. It must have been with some delight, not unmixed with a little trepidation, such as one feels when performing an adventurous feat for the first time, that George Eliot thus gave rein to the strong indignation, which, suddenly free, darted forward with a noble, spirited movement of which neither she nor Lewes had thought it capable.

This freedom and strength is not strikingly evident in the earlier articles written at Weimar and Berlin, though these also show a certain amount of independence of thought and expression. In the one on Madame de Sablé,[1] written soon after her departure from England, we are at once surprised by an opinion which we should scarcely have expected from her and find it very difficult to agree with. She praises French women writers above all others because "they alone have had a vital influence on the development of literature. . . . In France alone, if the writings of women were swept away, a serious gap would be made in the national history." This superiority of French women is due to their "being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men; and this must ever be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and of true social well-being." The necessity of this comradeship has been insisted on strongly enough since her day. Mr. Meredith has shown how essential it is to the spirit of comedy; but we can hardly see the relative importance of French and English women writers from her standpoint. Most of our greatest women writers belong to the nineteenth century, and since George Eliot was contemporary, or almost so, with many of the others, she had a very different view of the field of literature from that which presents itself to us. Still, one is inclined to think she rather overstated the case and might have given a fairer value to Miss Austen and Charlotte Brontë at least. That up to her time French women had a greater influence on their literature than Englishwomen on theirs must, however, be admitted.

In an article[2] written while Marian was editing the *Westminster* Mr. Lewes had expressed the opinion that women have a definite place in literature; they should not attempt to imitate masculine writers, but should give an account of things from a feminine point of view.

[1] *West. Rev.*, Oct., 1854.
[2] "Lady Novelists," *West. Rev.*, July, 1852.

George Eliot closes her essay by declaring her conviction that women have something of their own to contribute to literature, and pleads that "the whole world of reality" shall be thrown open to them as to men, so that what is peculiar to them as women shall have the opportunity of expressing itself and forming "a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life."[1]

We need not linger over the next two articles, "Prussia and the Prussian Policy,"[2] and "Memoirs of the Court of Austria"[3] —an account of Vehse's book—as they contain little that is important for our purpose. It is worth while, however, to note in passing that George Eliot knew how to make use of the romantic charm of unusual names, though the knowledge was not turned to great account in her novels. Here is the opening passage of the article on Prussia: "The ripple that disturbed the smooth waters of the Golden Horn when Prince Menschikoff dropped anchor under the Seraglio has spread its circles from shore to shore."

Some of the warmth and forcibleness of expression that mark her greater essays are apparent in both of these articles, especially in the one on Prussia; that on Austria, from the nature of the book she is reviewing, is much occupied with biography, but the earlier article being a discussion of government and policy, there is ample opportunity for strong, undaunted words about tyranny which, whether civil or religious, was to her a thing not to be endured.[4]

Readers of the *Westminster* must have been pleasantly surprised by the sudden improvement in the "Belles Lettres" section which appeared in the July number of 1855. The standard had been rather low for one or two issues; indeed, a brief review of Ray's *Proverbs*, which appeared in April, with its short, dull sentences, all of one pattern, might have been the exercise of a jaded schoolboy. There could scarcely be a greater contrast than that between this and the review of Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* in the July number—in which the work of a capable and conscientious critic is at once recognisable.

Knowing this to be the writing of George Eliot, one is not surprised to find that the religious aspect of the book receives most of her attention. Kingsley is submitted to a searching criticism. She cannot endure his "cool arrogance" towards men of science and learning, and she points out a certain irrationality of conduct in cases where there is a difficulty in

[1] George Eliot evidently did not agree with Madame de Stael that "*Le génie n'a pas de sexe.*"

[2] *West. Rev.*, Jan., 1855.

[3] *Ibid.*, April, 1855.

[4] An article on Dryden, *West. Rev.*, July, 1855, may possibly be hers. A short note concerning it is affixed to this chapter.

making science and religion agree. She also objects strongly to his habit of preaching, but finally acknowledges that "our dominant feeling towards his works in general is that of high admiration."

It is thus with all her criticism. She cannot let a falsity pass, whether in ethics or art; especially does she remonstrate when some mean motive of action is offered instead of a higher and sterner one. Miss Jewsbury had written a novel called *Constance Herbert*, a homily on the theme "Nothing one renounces for the sake of a higher principle will prove to have been worth the keeping." This is earnestly combatted by George Eliot in the following sentence, which might easily have stood in one of her novels; indeed it is one of the truths she most persistently taught: "This notion that duty looks stern, but all the while has her hand full of sugar plums, with which she will reward us by and bye, is the favourite cant of optimists, who try to make out that this tangled wilderness of life has a plan as easy to trace as that of a Dutch garden; but it really undermines all true moral development by perpetually substituting something extrinsic as a motive to action, instead of the immediate impulse of love or justice which alone makes an action truly moral."[1]

It is very often the morals of a novel which occupy her most. Very few contemporary works of fiction pleased her, either as mental food or amusement, but she learned to pass without severe censure those which were simply harmlessly amusing, and even calmly to recommend such and such a book for light reading in the boudoir. It was a real pleasure to her when Mrs. Beecher Stowe's *Dred* came under her hand and she could indulge herself in hearty, generous praise. Charles Reade's *Never Too Late to Mend* was also commended by her, though, comparing it with Mrs. Stowe's book, which she considered a work of genius, it seemed to her not to "rise above the level of cleverness."

Most interesting of all her reviews of novels is that of Meredith's *Shaving of Shagpat*.[2] This delicious extravaganza delighted her, and she gave it enthusiastic praise both in the *Leader* and in the *Westminster*. It was the work of a poetical genius, a *new Arabian Night*, not a mere imitation. She recognises the deep meaning that is present in the tale "for those who cannot be satisfied without deep meanings," but praises the writer for not thrusting forward his lessons. The love duet of Bhanavar and Almeryl is rightly singled out for its poetic beauty, and the story of Khipil the builder is quoted with a quiet glee which recalls her childish enjoyment of *Mercury and the Statue-seller*.

[1] "Belles Lettres," July, 1855.
[2] The *Leader*, Jan. 5th, 1856, and *West. Rev.*, April, 1856.

Budding poets meet with little encouragement from George Eliot. After examining a batch of them she dismisses the group with slight praise, wishing the best of them "a better vocation than that of a mere verse writer."[1]

She has no notion of sparing the lash when some silly or harmful book comes under her notice, and when to stupidity and worthlessness is joined impudent boasting she becomes absolutely merciless. A person named Fullom, who had written a reprehensible book called the *History of Woman*, rouses her wrath and brings down on himself a severe chastisement. George Eliot says that she shows less tolerance to him than to many other unqualified writers because "an obscure writer who announces himself through a string of newspaper puffs, which insinuate that he has 'taken the town by storm,' and that 'his career of fame continues unchecked,' who has the audacity to call a book stuffed with vulgar anecdotes and vulgar errors, the mere froth and scum of historical reading, a *History of Woman*, and to prefix to it a preface, in which he says, with an air of grave patronage, that he has not chosen to 'harass and perplex' the reader by a citation of authorities, but that 'should it be thought desirable, they can be given more fully in another edition'—such a writer becomes insufferable from the mere loudness of his braying."[2]

It is instructive to notice some of her articles of faith as an artist. In a review of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, Vol. III.,[3] we find there are several points of agreement between her mind and his. As one might expect, she approves his dictum "that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature"; it was by the same method that the truth and beauty of her own writing were attained.

Ruskin's preference for creative over sentimental or self-examining verse "puts her into excellent humour" by exalting her dearly beloved Scott. This agreement is not so self-evident as the other; but probably one result of the intense introspection of her girlhood and early womanhood was to make her still turn with relief to the objective kind of literature. The perfect fruit of this habit and this preference is seen in the skilful and harmonious blending of the objective and subjective in her novels, neither gaining an undue prominence, though the objective is most in evidence in a book like *Silas Marner* and the subjective in *The Mill on the Floss*. She quotes Ruskin's condemnation of inferior work, and heartily endorses his strict demand that unless a writer can produce poetry of the best he shall produce none at all, for fear of hampering the public and hindering the best from being read. One or two sentences from

[1] "Belles Lettres," April, 1856. [2] *Ibid.*, July, 1855.
[3] *Ibid.*, April, 1856.

her reviews of poems by Tennyson and Browning are well worth quoting. "Tennyson's *Ulysses* is a pure little ingot of the same gold that runs through the ore of the Odyssey."[1]

Browning's "robust energy is informed by a subtle, penetrating spirit, and this blending of opposite qualities gives his mind a rough piquancy that reminds one of a russet apple."[2]

The description of the effect of prosaic lines in Wordsworth's finest poems as being that of "bricks built into a rock" is a good stroke.

During 1855-56 George Eliot wrote a number of short articles, chiefly reviews, for the *Leader*. They are marked by the same characteristic as those in the *Westminster*—a strong desire to be just, an inability to praise anything at all where the moral tone is displeasing to her, a preference for giving either strong praise or strong blame, rather than a weak mixture of both, eager appreciation of fine work, and impatient intolerance of slip-shod performances. In most of her reviews in both the *Westminster* and the *Leader* she indulges very freely in quotations, longer and more numerous than would be admitted to-day.

One of the *Leader* articles is a hearty eulogy of Carlyle.[3] She calls him a "dynamic" writer, likens his work to an oak whose acorns have sown a forest, accepts his style as part of himself, and praises most of all his concrete presentation of character. In contrast to this is the severity with which she punishes Lord Brougham[4] for making use of his leisure to thrust "third-rate biographies in the style of a literary hack" upon a public likely to be misled by his name. The good work he has done for the country does not exempt him from blame when he executes bad literary work.

More attractive than these, especially at the present day, is an article[5] in which she expresses some of her views on "the woman question." She claims that a woman should be free to choose any occupation for which she believes herself to be fitted, and she sees "no consistent commodious medium between the old plan of corporal discipline, and that thorough education of women which will make them rational beings in the highest sense of the word. Whenever weakness is not harshly controlled it must govern," as a child obliges a strong man to fit his large step to its small one.

[1] "Belles Lettres," Oct., 1855.

[2] *Ibid.*, Jan., 1856.

[3] Review of "Passages Selected from the Writings of T. Carlyle." The *Leader*, Oct. 27th, 1855.

[4] Review of "Lives of Men of Letters in the Reign of George III." The *Leader*, July 7th, 1855.

[5] Article on Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecroft, *Leader*, Oct. 13th, 1855. George Eliot was anxious to have a wider education for women, and was amongst the first subscribers to Girton College (Cross, p. 624).

George Eliot's criticisms are, on the whole, just and penetrating. She never made the mistake of condemning a really great book because it was too original, nor did she overpraise and welcome as works of genius books that were not worthy of being treasured. Perhaps the nearest she approached to the first was in her inability to admire *Maud*, the frenzy of which was distasteful to her sane, calm mind. The spell of Mrs. Stowe's goodness and attractive sincerity made her perhaps more generous to *Dred* than is the present generation, but George Eliot was never blinded to defects by the fame of a writer, though she had to strive hard not to let her opinion of a book be too much influenced by her own appreciation of the writer's past work. She determined to speak out fearlessly what she herself thought without caring whether she stood alone in her opinion. Indeed, her reason for noticing one novel—*Perversion*—is that certain grave critics have praised it, and as she finds much that is unsatisfactory in the book, she wants to set the balance right. A modern critic would probably object that the ethical enters far too largely into her criticism, and that form, especially in poetry, receives less than its share of attention.

PART II.

GREATER ESSAYS.

George Eliot, though fair and clear-sighted, was not among the really great critics. As has been said before, she hated the task of judging another's work; she was an artist with a strong impulse to create. She was to make literature, not to pass judgment on it; the work of reviewing was no more to her taste than that of editing. I think she must have found much more satisfaction in the writing of her longer articles, as they gave a little more play to her individuality, and more frequent opportunities to act as interpreter instead of judge. The article, "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming,"[1] was, with the exception of the "Three Months in Weimar," the first writing of hers which she cared to have preserved.[2]

[1] *West. Rev.*, Oct., 1855.

[2] Dr. Cumming was a popular preacher at Crown Court, Covent Garden. He seems to have been very generous towards his own church, and much admired by his congregation, who gave him a handsome pension when he retired. Very earnest and energetic, he was also extremely bigoted, and wasted his strength in disputing and quarrelling with Puseyites and Roman Catholics. People seem to have enjoyed being thrilled by his warning that "the last vial" was to be poured out between 1848 and 1867, and the fearsome titles of some of his works may possibly account for their popularity: *e.g.*, *Lectures for the Times, or an Exposition of Tridentine and Tractarian Popery; The Great Tribulation, or Things Coming on the Earth.*

It is a stinging attack on the selfishness, falsity and bigotry of popular evangelical preaching. We must remember that this is not, as someone has suggested, the first rebound of a large nature cramped by narrow dogma; her change of religious views was now some fourteen years old; this essay expresses the settled opinion of her mature mind. George Eliot accuses Dr. Cumming's writings of being devoid of spirituality, of tenderness and loving sympathy. He attacks the Pope and the Puseyites and exalts only the Evangelicals. Infidels are vile, but Romanists evidently more vile. All human good is evil; only a regenerate man is capable of real good. Men ought only to do what is right and lovely for the glory of God, and not for love of rightness and loveliness or of humanity. He seems to find pleasure in the idea of eternal punishment and prophecies of wrath and vengeance and so on. All this is very obnoxious to her. She convicts his teaching of unscrupularity of statement, of lack of genuine charity, and of perverted moral judgment, in language which, while it is the vehicle of sound reasoning and a just weighing of evidence, glows with indignation, and rises to a high pitch of eloquence in its powerful denunciation. Clear and harmonious her style had always been, but now it shows warmth, strength, beauty and motion, most of which had before only been suggested or appeared momentarily. Here the eloquence and energy never flag.

The opening is almost as powerful and bitter as Swift: "Given a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? Where is that Goshen of mediocrity in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egoism as God-given piety? Let such a man become an evangelical preacher; he will then find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with the prestige of erudition, and middling morals with a high reputation for sanctity. Let him shun practical extremes and be ultra only in what is purely theoretic; let him be stringent on Predestination, but latitudinarian on Fasting; unflinching in insisting on the eternity of punishment, but diffident of curtailing the substantial comforts of time; ardent and imaginative on the pre-millenial advent of Christ, but cold and cautious towards every other infringement of the *status quo*. Let him fish for souls not with the bait of inconvenient singularity, but with the drag-net of comfortable conformity. Let him be hard and literal in his interpretation only when he wants to hurl texts at

the heads of unbelievers and adversaries, but when the letter of the Scriptures presses too closely on the genteel Christianity of the nineteenth century, let him use his spiritualising alembic and disperse it into impalpable ether."[1]

One might quote many fine passages from this essay, passages which thrill with intense yearning towards humanity and passionate, strenuous endeavour to guard it from falsity and presumptuous ignorance. If we had space to examine it in detail we might dwell on the powerful grasp and skilful marshalling of evidence, the well-chosen illustrations, the harmonious arrangement of the whole, but as these are less to our purpose than the points of mental attitude and style already noticed they must be merely mentioned and passed by.

It is the artist quite as much as the truth-lover who objects when Cumming puts rhetoric savouring of the pulpit into the mouth of a peasant, and makes Satan say to Eve: "Surely you are mistaken, that God hath said you shall die, a creature so fair, so lovely, so beautiful. It is impossible. *The laws of nature and physical science tell you that my interpretation is correct.* You shall not die."

In reading this article one cannot but think of the sympathetic treatment of Evangelicalism in *Janet's Repentance*, and we have a momentary feeling of wonder when we look at the two side by side and remember that less than two years divide them; it passes, however, in the recognition that what she attacked in the earlier work was the harmful, crippling power of the movement when in the hands of a popular preacher, who succeeded in keeping what tenderness of heart he had quite outside his sermons—a power which degraded humanity for the glory of God. What she loved in it was the human sympathy, the deep devotion which did sometimes, as in the case of Tryan, grow out of Evangelicalism, in spite of its narrowing influence.

The essay on Cumming created a great impression, but George Eliot wished to keep the authorship a secret, lest any good effect it might have should be counteracted by the knowledge that the author was a woman.

The power of it was felt not only by the public, but also by Mr. Lewes. He had always known that Marian was highly talented, but until this time he had not been sure of anything beyond that. Now he was quite convinced that she had not only talent but genius, and he began again to think of that possible novel. Her husband's opinion was much more to her than that of anyone else, for she had perfect confidence in him as a capable critic, one, moreover, who was particularly well-fitted to help her, who understood her powers and limitations quite as well as she did herself. The production of this, her first really notable piece of work, thus brought her a good deal of quiet joy.

[1] *Essays*, pp. 121-22.

During 1856, besides many smaller articles which appeared chiefly in the *Leader*, George Eliot published three important ones, two of which are concerned with German literature and German life. They are "German Wit: Heinrich Heine"[1] and "The Natural History of German Life: Riehl."[2] These articles show her warm admiration for that nation, an admiration against which there is to be set only a sense of its deficiency in matters of wit and humour. "A German comedy," she writes in the earlier article, "is like a German sentence: you see no reason in its structure why it should ever come to an end, and you accept the conclusion as an arrangement of Providence rather than of the author."[3]

But she considers the poorness of Germany's contribution to the fun of the world far more than atoned for by the greater things she has done for us. "She has fought the hardest fight for freedom of thought, has produced the grandest inventions, has made magnificent contributions to Science, has given us some of the divinest poetry, and quite the divinest music in the world."

Her treatment of Heine is very different from her treatment of Cumming; but in that essay she was dealing with the writings of a person, not with the man himself. Here she is mainly concerned with the writer, and uses the writings chiefly to complete and beautify the picture of Heine. So in the former essay we find stern justice, clear-eyed, unrelenting; in the second one, tender mercy and ready approval. To her it seemed that the whole spirit of Cumming's writing was inhuman, and therefore harmful. She could not take the books, extract a number of pages and say, "There, you may read the rest with enjoyment and get good of it." The thing was bad at heart. With Heine it was different; his faults were outward blemishes, not diseases, and though she did not ignore his occasional coarseness and scurrility, she thought that after the use of a "friendly penknife" there would be a plenteous remainder of exquisite poetry, of wit, humour and just thought.

With the exception of the introduction, which consists of a clear-sighted, but somewhat laboured, discrimination between wit and humour, and a criticism of German wit in general, the essay is mainly biographical.

One would expect that this kind of subject—it is her avowed intention to depict rather than to discuss the poet—would be the one in which a gifted novelist might excel, and the result is not disappointing. The thought of Heine, with all his brilliance, all his faults, all his nobility, and still more, all his suffering, touched her deeply. There was something which moved her strongly in the idea of poor Heine on his wretched

[1] *West. Rev.*, Jan., 1856. [2] *Ibid.*, July, 1856. [3] *Essays*, p. 73.

bed, waiting for the more complete death that was so long coming. More than once she speaks of the increased sensitiveness to all kinds of pain that greater natures possess, and the thought of it and her own fellow-feeling deepened her pity for the German poet. If she is a little startled by the forceful impact of passages of towering audacity, such as that beginning, "Alas, God's satire weighs heavily on me"—and scarcely knows whether the check she has felt is that of the sublime or the repellent—she immediately says: "It is not for us to condemn who have never had the same burthen laid upon us; it is not for pigmies at their ease to criticise the writhings of the Titan chained to the rock."

She goes a little out of the ordinary track to touch on one or two details that interested her personally. One was that Heinrich Heine's baptismal name was Harry, "which he afterwards had the good taste to change," as she herself had changed the unbeautiful "Mary Ann" to the more pleasing "Marian." His nervous headaches are also mentioned, and someone's spiteful saying that they were an excuse for raising a delicate white hand to his head. George Eliot also suffered from terrible headaches, and she also had a finely shaped hand, and she could feel the cruelty of such spitefulness.

"Slight details, these," as she says, "but worth telling about a man of genius, because they help us to keep in mind that he is, after all, our brother." Worth noticing, too, for one who is to make men live, and will have great need of many such details.

Touches of quiet humour are more frequent in this article than in any former one, and there is throughout a quiet serenity which seems to suggest the presence of a dawning hope; this effect, however, may be only the result of satisfaction in her subject. The style, of course, differs from that of the essay on Cumming, but is certainly not a falling-back. Each succeeding essay shows an increased ease and a greater flexibility. In this one there is no appearance of effort, except, perhaps, in the introduction, when she is taking great pains to say exactly what she understands by "wit" and "humour."

The critical portion of the essay is one of her best efforts in criticism, and is worth reading quite apart from its connection with our present study. Sympathetic, revealing, artistic, it is exactly the kind of writing which would be most likely to attain her object—to create or strengthen an interest in the man and his writings. The comparison between Goethe and Heine is too well done to be omitted. "The distinctive charm of his lyrics may best be seen by comparing them with Goethe's. Both have the same masterly finished simplicity and rhythmic grace; but there is more thought mingled with Goethe's feeling—his lyrical genius is a vessel that draws more water than Heine's, and though it seems to glide along with equal ease, we have a

sense of greater weight and force accompanying the grace of its movement. But, for this very reason, Heine touches our hearts more strongly; his songs are all music and feeling—they are like birds that not only enchant us with their delicious notes, but nestle against us with their soft breasts, and make us feel the agitated beating of their hearts."

A different interest attaches to the article on "The Natural History of German Life." Four-fifths of it are taken up by an excellent account of Riehl's two books, *Land und Leute* and *Die Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. Riehl had devoted some years to getting a thorough knowledge of the German people, and had spared no pains in collecting and arranging his material so that it might be of exceedingly great value and interest to his countrymen. It was work with which George Eliot thoroughly sympathised, and the essay was written with the hope of drawing attention to the want of similar work in England. We need not dwell on the bulk of the article; the first few pages have much more interest for us, as they are chiefly devoted to setting forth opinions of her own which lay at the foundation of her work as a novelist. She complains of the ignorance of the real life of "the people," "the masses," "the proletariat," "the peasantry," among social and political theorists and workers. Especially does she dwell on the almost general failure of artists, both in painting and literature, to give any true picture of the peasant. Even so great a realist as Holman Hunt could paint in the "Hireling Shepherd" a pair of peasants as unreal as those of Dresden china, while another artist gives his ploughman features that would serve for a handsome *primo tenore*.

George Eliot proceeds to give a picture of the English peasant as her own close observation had made him known to her, and contrasts him to the literary and idyllic peasant: "Idyllic ploughmen are jocund when they drive their team afield; idyllic shepherds make bashful love under hawthorn bushes; idyllic villagers dance in the chequered shade and refresh themselves, not immoderately, with spicy nut-brown ale. But no one who has seen much of actual ploughmen thinks them jocund; no one who is well acquainted with English peasantry can pronounce them merry. The slow gaze in which no sense of beauty beams, no humour twinkles; the slow utterance and the heavy, slouching walk, remind one rather of that melancholy animal the camel than of the sturdy countryman, with striped stocking, red waistcoat, and hat aside, who represents the traditional English peasant. Observe a company of haymakers. When you see them at a distance, tossing up the forkfuls of hay in the golden light, while the wagon creeps slowly with its increasing burthen over the meadow, and the bright green space which tells of work done gets larger and

larger, you pronounce the scene 'smiling,' and you think these companions in labour must be as bright and cheerful as the picture to which they give animation. Approach nearer, and you will certainly find that hay-making time is a time for joking, especially if there are women among the labourers; but the coarse laugh that bursts out every now and then, and expresses the triumphant taunt, is as far as possible from your conception of idyllic merriment. That delicious effervescence of the mind which we call fun has no equivalent for the northern peasant, except tipsy revelry; the only realm of fancy and imagination for the English clown exists at the bottom of the third quart pot."[1]

Nor do honesty and other virtues belong by right of birth to the countryman, "The selfish instincts are not subdued by the sight of buttercups. . . . To make men moral, something more is requisite than to turn them out to grass."[2]

A frank idealisation like that of opera peasants does not annoy her, but she looks on novels that pretend to give us a true representation, and give instead a false one, as a grave evil. "The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies,"[3] and this benefit is conferred far more effectively by art than by statistics, sermons, or philosophies. "Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot,"[4] and George Eliot is seriously distressed by the thought that the sympathy which ought to be given to the struggles and joys, tragedy, toil and humour of the people, is wasted on a false object through the insincerity or inadequacy of art.

Instead of the truth we are given pictures of the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant. She turns from these impatiently, and one feels the impression of her passionate earnestness as she exclaims—"We want to be taught to feel," not for these, "but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness."

Many precious opportunities for observation are, as she says, thrown away, or no records are made, and so we go muddling on with our false ideas, much in need of some Riehl to make our lower classes known to us.

Long before George Eliot had really decided to write a novel she had learned the first and most important lesson for anyone who wishes to do good and lasting work of this class—to write about what she knew best. She had also laid down another rule, rarely departed from, not to invent immaculate characters. Deronda and Myra are not exceptions to this; Deronda could be guilty of unfairness and anger—soon past,

[1] *Essays*, pp. 191-92. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 192. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 192.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

of course—and Myra could not believe in any woman having a purely selfless love. In a letter to Miss Hennell, written in February, 1856, she wrote: "I wish less of our piety were spent on imaginary perfect goodness, and more given to real imperfect goodness."[1]

Mr. Lewes was beginning "to say very positively, 'You must try and write a story,'" and we know by this time that if the story is ever written it will have at least the good qualities of perfect sincerity, understanding sympathy and a beautiful, musical style. We know also that it is likely to depict the lives of country people; what we are uncertain about is the point that troubled George Eliot herself, whether she had sufficient dramatic power to keep up the life-likeness, and the interest of a reader.

Mr. Bray wrote a kind note to her about the article on Riehl. How full of promise of anxiety and despondency is this passage in her answer: "I never think what I write is good for anything till other people tell me so, and even then it always seems to me as if I should never write anything else worth reading."[2] It needed all Mr. Lewes's encouragement to give her heart to write at all, but to save her from the miseries of self-doubt was more than even he could do.

George Eliot had begun the article entitled "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness; the Poet Young" in April, but laid it aside for the one on Riehl. That being finished, she took up the former study, and appears to have completed it before beginning the article on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," though the latter appeared in October, 1856, and the one on Young not until January, 1857. I shall consider them in the order of writing, not of publication.

Remembering Marian's early appreciation of Young, and coming to this essay with a mind calm and clear and charitable from the reading of those on Heine and Riehl, one is startled by the scathing contempt of its opening pages. Young is a remarkable specimen "of the species *divine*—a surprising name considering the nature of the animal before us." She examines him critically and with too strong a feeling of antagonism and disgust to show any trace of sympathy until the process is nearly over. As she prepared to write this essay, how strongly she must have felt the distance she had travelled during the last twenty years, how keenly she must have recognised the difference between her present self and the young country girl moving about the old house and the sweet-smelling dairy, her mind strenuously at work trying to grasp what seemed the true notions of life and eternity; eagerly and trustfully accepting any guidance that was offered; finding gladness in the perusal

[1] Cross, p. 198. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

of these same poems which now stirred her to angry opposition. Like Lamb, she must have felt a tender inclination to "cherish the remembrance" of this younger self, to dwell affectionately on the thought of how sincere and honest it was, "how religious, how imaginative, how hopeful." Her firm belief in the great good of progress would, however, prevent her thoughts from taking the sad tinge of Lamb's, the feeling of regret for the change. Those twenty years had not brought the perfect knowledge or perfect happiness she had dimly hoped for, but they had brought light, if not the charmed light of early morning or of late evening, at least the clear, undeceiving light of noon; if her happiness was not perfect, it was at least real and no longer a dream; if her hopes were less gorgeous, they were more likely to be attained. Best of all, they had brought what she valued most—a deeper, more human sympathy with her kind, and the prospect of increasing this precious feeling in the minds of others.

That something of this was in her thoughts is evident, for she admits that her stern judgment "is entirely opposed to our youthful predilections and enthusiasm. The sweet garden-breath of early enjoyment lingers about many a page of the *Night Thoughts*, and even of the *Last Day*, giving an extrinsic charm to passages of stilted rhetoric and false sentiment; but the sober repeated reading of maturer years has convinced us that it would hardly be possible to find a more typical instance than Young's poetry, of the mistake which substitutes interested obedience for sympathetic emotion and baptises egoism as religion."[1]

There are many minds, neither of the meanest nor of the noblest order, who, if they come in after years to think much less highly of a man or book that was once a valued teacher, mingle with their feelings towards the once-venerated object a touch of resentment, as though the excess of their poor admiration above the just amount was now a bad debt laid to the account of the discarded idol. So Hazlitt passed from rather extravagant adoration of Coleridge to something less than justice. But George Eliot kept too strict a watch over her own mind to fall into so pitiful an error. It is not personal resentment that embitters this article, though her opinion about Young was entirely changed; it is sincere and unselfish indignation that this man's works should still be held up as beneficial to men while she believed that they were capable of doing serious harm. This is the second time that she has voluntarily taken upon herself the unenviable task of devil's advocate, and opposed with all her strength the sanctification of unworthy, though popular, would-be saints. In both cases she went

[1] *Essays*, p. 32.

against the general opinion: Cumming was surrounded by enthusiastic admirers; Young's writings were still supposed to be a treasury of lofty moral and spiritual thought. As she says: "Young's biographers and critics have usually set out from the position that he was a great religious teacher, and that his poetry is morally sublime; and they have toned down his failings into harmony with their conception of the divine and the poet. For our own part we set out from precisely the opposite conviction, namely, that the religious and moral spirit of Young's poetry is low and false; and we think it of some importance to show that the *Night Thoughts* are the reflex of a mind in which the higher human sympathies were inactive."[1]

In all the three essays devoted to the works of individuals—Cumming, Heine and Young[2]—we find her taking up the position of an advocate. If a thing was good she loved to speak up strongly for it and not to concern herself with its faults; if bad, especially if morally bad, she wanted it done away with, or at least branded, and, out of anxiety for the welfare of humanity, she treated it with unrelenting severity. She would either attack or defend in the cause of right, but the moral significance of a work was so much to her that she could not assume the cool, unprejudiced, calmly-balancing mind of the judge. This, of course, takes away from her value as a critic, and it is most clearly evident in this article.

In the early part of the essay she lays bare, without any sign of compunction, all the odious faults of meanness, cringing, sycophancy, servility and impudence of which Young was guilty, and finds no compensating virtues of character. Her criticism of his poetry accords fairly well with the general estimate of it to-day, but she needed then to go into much detail and prove her accusations of bad rhyme, lack of taste, bombast, inadequacy of figure, and ridiculous failures in attempting the sublime, by many quotations. To-day we dwell less on these and more on the spark of Promethean fire which she admits but does not enlarge upon, though she gives several extracts to show the glowing of the fire. She finds him guilty of "radical insincerity as a poetic artist," which made him perpetrate such lines as—

> "An eye of awe and wonder let me roll,
> And roll for ever."

But a still more serious fault in her eyes is his "want of genuine emotion." This is an artistic as well as a human fault, but George Eliot dwells chiefly on its human (or inhuman) side Young sees nothing between worldly grandeur and success, and the planets; and no natural object nearer than the moon has

[1] *Essays*, p. 32.
[2] That on Riehl is concerned with a subject as distinct from a person.

any attraction for him. He has no milk of human kindness, either in the Shaksperean or the popular sense, and it is this that she finds it more impossible to forgive even than insincerity.

She finds hardly a trace of human sympathy even in *Night Thoughts*, but she finds something that never fails to call forth strong words of protest from her—the assertion that morality is dependent on belief in immortality. After resenting this with all her might she proceeds: "Nay, to us it is conceivable that in some minds the deep pathos lying in the thought of human mortality—that we are here for a little while and then vanish away, that this earthly life is all that is given to our loved ones and to our many suffering fellow-men—lies nearer the fountains of moral emotion than the conception of extended existence."

After showing the disastrous effect of this lack of sympathetic emotion on his poetry, whether regarded from an artistic or moral standpoint, George Eliot brings the essay to a close by a comparison of Young with Cowper, interesting but one-sided, as it is really only a condemnation of Young's insincerity and lack of charity by the exhibition of these traits in all their beauty in the works of Cowper, and takes no note of that true poetic power occasionally displayed by the author of *Night Thoughts*. Lest we should be unjust to George Eliot for her severity in this article, we must call to mind again her announcement that she intends to deal with Young's failures and failings without fulfilling the critic's task by dwelling on his merits. She was not blind to the "startling vigour of his imagery," "the occasional grandeur of his thoughts," and so on, but she wanted all the space at her disposal to treat of his faults, since they had been much neglected and his merits over-praised. It is another case of her strong sense of justice impelling her to correct a wrong balance. This essay is remarkable, too, for the passages of beauty and of powerful, sonorous music which it contains—music which frequently sounds again in passages of impassioned thought in her novels.

Before the completion of the article on Young, George Eliot had quite made up her mind to attempt fiction-writing, and was anxious to begin as soon as she had finished with "Other-Worldliness," but somehow we find her putting it off a little longer and writing the article on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists." Probably she had been reading, or calling to mind, recent attempts of women in fiction, with the object of comparing them with her own growing ideas. The result was not pleasing. She found then, as we do now, a large number of novels that were written merely to idle away the time of both writer and reader, novels without a suggestion of deep thought or feeling, utterly lacking in truth and beauty, and they taxed

her patience beyond its power. It is to be remembered, however, that the workmanship of the common ephemeral novel of her times was distinctly inferior to that of to-day.

It is rather a pity that the last article we have to consider should be the one we value least of her later essays of this period—one, also, which she herself recognised as below her best work and did not choose to have reprinted. It would have been a pleasanter article if she had treated of the work of women novelists in general, instead of selecting those she did. She needlessly subjected herself to torture as maddening as the gadfly's sting to Io, with the result that she is not quite herself and sometimes seems to write almost deliriously, as when she speaks of an intellectually monstrous child as exhibiting "symptoms so alarmingly like those of adolescence repressed by gin," and of the child's mother as a "polking polyglot, a Creuzer in a crinoline."[1] The questionable taste of such expressions is only to be explained by the almost intolerable exasperation which she was suffering.

She takes a grim satisfaction in classifying her specimens of silly novels into four species—the "mind and millinery species," a mixture of the frothy. the prosy, the pious and the pedantic; the "oracular species," which are intended to expound the writer's religious, philosophical, or moral theories; the "white-neckcloth species," a travesty of Evangelicalism; and the "modern-antique species," concerned with such subjects as the love affairs of Sennacherib.

All these suffer at her hands a remorseless castigation, but their faults are so evident that it is not worth while to give quotations to show the justice of the criticism, and sufficient quotations have been given from other essays to exhibit her powers of satire and rebuke; the names of the species show the temper in which this was written.

Like the articles on Cumming and Young, it is full of keen sarcasm and pitiless irony; the relentless attack on the flabby and ridiculous being as unswerving as the attack on what she considered false and revolting in popular religion. There is as much anger at the waste of time and effort which these novels cause as at the waste of feeling and energy occasioned by unsound religion. But while in these articles her chief feeling seems to have been indignation, here it is impatience, for there she was attacking falsity; here, simple puerility. George Eliot surely descended from her proper sphere in attacking such insignificant objects. It was like using a gun to kill gnats; a dish-cloth would be more appropriate and probably more effective.

One would expect such a woman to prepare herself for novel-

[1] Note the alliteration—a device very seldom used in her best writing.

writing rather by the reading of the noblest novels—women's novels if she wishes, since she believes in a distinct feminine element in literature—than by an examination of the trashy, ephemeral novels of the day. How much more valuable would have been an article on Jane Austen, Harriet Martineau, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and Mrs. Gaskell. But perhaps the editor's requirements made any choice impossible. The poverty and unsuitableness of the subject had a bad effect on the work as a whole; George Eliot could only criticise in seriousness as a moralist and an artist. These books were unworthy of criticism either as fine art or moral teaching. They should have been lightly laughed at; instead, they are seriously judged by canons which their writers made no pretence of observing; of which, perhaps, they were totally ignorant.

Of course, there is nothing in this kind of writing that anticipates the calm strength and repose, the slow-moving, grand simplicity of her early novels. The style is quick and quite devoid of any feeling of rest. The sweet humour and god-like charity of her books are quite absent. Instead, there is wit, strong-bladed rather than keen-edged, and a distinct suggestion of asperity, more resembling some of the essays in *Theophrastus Such* than any work nearer in its date of composition.

There is significance in her condemnation of the writers of the "white-neckcloth species" for attempting to picture Evangelicalism in "high life"; they are realistic only in one point—the insipidity of the young curates who are their favourite heroes. "It is less excusable in an evangelical novelist than in any other gratuitously to seek her subjects among titles and carriages. The real drama of Evangelicalism—and it has abundance of fine drama for anyone who has genius enough to discern and reproduce it—lies among the middle and lower classes; and are not evangelical opinions understood to give an especial interest in the weak things of the earth, rather than in the mighty?"

It seems as though many of the subjects and characters of her first novels must have been already passing in review before her. The "fine drama" of Evangelicalism was already discerned by her, and was soon to receive an immortal interpretation in *Janet's Repentance.*

There is need to say but little more about George Eliot as a reviewer and critic. We have seen how during this time she was preparing for her future work; how the constant practice in writing had developed her style to a high perfection of beauty, dignity and resonance; how her attention was gradually turning to that class of literature for which she was most highly gifted. In one or two matters these essays present not so much

traits which are gradually approaching maturity, but traits which have passed that stage, and are now about to decline. One of these is her antagonism to theology.[1] In her earlier essays this is still evident; one would have no doubt in reading them that the writer was an emancipated thinker. This is not so in her novels. To the instructed reader there are many indications of her affinities with modern thought and its great leaders, but an ordinary reader would miss all this and might quite easily, in the earlier novels at any rate, read on without suspecting that the writer was other than orthodox. The instinctive feeling of the artist led her to conceal, or at least render quite unobtrusive, anything that might turn the attention of her reader from the study of humanity to the never-ending quarrel between liberty and dogma.

A second noticeable feature of this kind is the severity of much of her periodic writing as compared with the wide-embracing mercifulness of her novels. Here, again, it was no doubt in part conscious art that made the difference, but the change was also due to the gradually increasing charity of her nature as she grew older. Besides this, she probably only learnt to hit out freely at objects she hated after the beginning of her union with Lewes, and not knowing her own strength, as some say of growing boys, she hit rather harder than she needed to. Some stinging passages of rebuke occur in her novels, but only at long intervals, which grow longer as one book succeeds another. These articles are, of course, but the prelude to her real work, but they contain suggestions and promises of the nobler type of production which was immediately to follow.

[1] But her antagonism to the Christian religion as a whole is almost gone. Passages even in the article on Cumming show that she appreciates the true spirit of Christianity; only the irritation roused by the fungi of religion has not yet quite subsided.

NOTE (see p. 104).—Article on Dryden, *West. Rev.*, April, 1855. This is attributed to George Eliot by Sir Leslie Stephen (*Dict. Nat. Biog.*, George Eliot). I have not included this article in chap. xii., as I cannot feel quite satisfied that it is really hers. The style lacks strength and beauty; the piling-up of a large number of short sentences, which occurs several times, is unlike her usual manner of writing; some passages are marred by common tags of speech, a fault of which she is very rarely guilty; a beautiful Shaksperean quotation is horribly mangled—"Age could not, it seemed, stale, nor variety wither him"—and Dryden's works are neatly divided into periods and numbered in a business-like fashion, after the manner of a professional teacher. These, and similar features of the essay, lead one to doubt its authorship, and to conclude that if George Eliot really did write it, she did so hurriedly, and when just fresh from a study of the subject through some other critic. The essay is mentioned by Cross (p. 193), but in a way which leaves doubt as to the authorship.

CHAPTER XIII.

GEORGE ELIOT'S FIRST WORK OF FICTION SEPTEMBER 1856 TO END OF 1857.

George Eliot had to find mind-room for other matters during this busy time of article-writing. Spinoza's *Ethics*, which she had begun to translate at Berlin, must be finished, and arrangements had to be made for the education of Mr. Lewes's three sons—a duty which she regarded as of the first importance. The translation was finished in February, 1856, but was never published. Early in May Mr. and Mrs. Lewes went to Ilfracombe and a month later to Tenby. At these two places the articles on Riehl and Young were written, and here a delightful time was spent in rambling and zoologising. They read zoological and other books, wrote articles, climbed about the rocks and hills, rested on the sands, bathed in the sea, and enjoyed the delicious air. Often they went to their "paradise" —St. Catherine's Rock with its caverns—"with baskets, hammers and chisels, and jars and phials, and came home laden with spoils"; they even planned a midnight excursion to St. Catherine's caverns "for the sake of seeing the zoophytes preparing for their midnight revels."

George Eliot not only enjoyed herself thoroughly, she also grew stronger and took a keener interest in zoology. The proposed novel was a frequent subject of conversation between her and Mr. Lewes, and she felt her powers gathering themselves for the effort. "I have absorbed many ideas and much bodily strength; indeed, I do not remember ever feeling so strong in mind and body as I feel at this moment. I never before longed so much to know the names of things. *The desire is part of the tendency that is now constantly growing in me to escape from all vagueness and inaccuracy into the daylight of distinct, vivid ideas.*"[1] And on the same page she writes: "*I am anxious to begin my fiction-writing.*"

Speaking of her in later years, Professor Beesley says that she had cast away every shred of theology and metaphysics. This quotation shows that she was advancing quickly to that state. Her naturally strong love of the practical and real was triumphing over the interest in speculation to which another

[1] *Journal*, July 20th. Cross, p. 203. (The italics are mine.)

tendency—love of truth—had given birth. It is worthy of note that along with this remark comes the sentence about fiction-writing. Vigour of mind and body is no doubt an important factor both in her desire for distinct, vivid ideas and her determination to make the long-thought-of attempt. Her one previous effort had got no further than an introductory chapter which was pure description of a Staffordshire village. George Eliot feared that she was deficient in dramatic power, and Mr. Lewes shared her doubts. Yet he thought that it would be worth while to try what she could do in fiction, and the article on Cumming gave him a higher opinion of her powers. In her account of how she came to write fiction, George Eliot says, "He began to say very positively 'You must try and write a story,' and when we were at Tenby he urged me to begin at once. I deferred it, however, after my usual fashion with work that does not present itself as an absolute duty. But one morning as I was thinking what should be the subject of my first story, my thoughts merged themselves into a dreamy dose, and I imagined myself writing a story, of which the title was *The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton.* I was soon wide awake and told G. He said, 'Oh, what a capital title!' and from that time I had settled in my mind that this should be my first story. George used to say 'It may be a failure—it may be that you are unable to write fiction. Or perhaps it may be just good enough to warrant you trying again.' Again, 'You may write a chef-d'œuvre at once—there's no telling.' But his prevalent impression was, that though I could hardly write a *poor* novel, my effort would want the highest quality of fiction—dramatic presentation. He used to say, 'You have wit, description, and philosophy—those go a good way towards the production of a novel. It is worth while for you to try the experiment. . . .'

"After I had begun my story, as we were talking in the park I mentioned to G. that I had thought of the plan of writing a series of stories, containing sketches drawn from my own observations of the clergy, and calling them *Scenes from Clerical Life*, opening with *Amos Barton.* He at once accepted the notion as a good one—fresh and striking; and about a week afterwards, when I read him the first part of *Amos*, he had no longer any doubt about my ability to carry out the plan. The scene at Cross Farm, he said, satisfied him that I had the very element he had been doubtful about—it was clear I could write good dialogue. There still remained the question whether I could command any pathos; and that was to be decided by the mode in which I treated Milly's death. One night G. went to town on purpose to leave me a quiet evening for writing it. I wrote the chapter from the news brought by the shepherd to Mrs. Hackit to the moment when Amos is

dragged from the bedside, and I read it to G. when he came home. We both cried over it, and then he came up to me and kissed me, saying, 'I think your pathos is better than your fun.'"[1]

This extract shows how important a part Mr. Lewes had in the production of her novels. His belief in her was just the kind of support she needed. "That is a deep and wide saying, that no miracle can be wrought without faith—without the worker's faith in himself, as well as the recipient's faith in him. And the greater part of the worker's faith in himself is made up of the faith that others believe in him."[2]

In George Eliot's case all the "others that believed in her" were rolled together in her husband, but his faith was strong enough to buoy up hers; that sentence is very literally true of her, whether universally so or not.

The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton was begun on September 22nd and finished on November 5th. The next day Mr. Lewes sent it to Mr. Blackwood, with whom he was personally acquainted, writing that it had been "submitted to him by a friend." He told Blackwood that the story was one of a series which was to deal with the life of the country clergy of twenty-five years ago, in its human, not its theological aspects, and that the tone would be "sympathetic, and not at all antagonistic." Lewes also offered his own opinion of the story, which was that "such humour, pathos, vivid presentation, and nice observation have not been exhibited (in this style) since the *Vicar of Wakefield*." Mr. Blackwood replied by a letter which most new writers would think encouraging. He said that *Amos* was very pleasant reading, praised the death of Milly as "powerfully done," and acknowledged the "happy turn of expression" and "much humour and pathos." However, he found one or two faults, the chief one being that there was too much explaining of the characters instead of allowing them to unfold themselves in action. Whether this be a fault or not, it is characteristic in varying degrees of all her work.

George Eliot was rather discouraged by the cautious tone of his letter; it was always so much easier for her to believe that what she did was disapproved than that it was admired, and her own self-doubt joined with the editor's few adverse criticisms to outweigh his genuine approval. Mr. Lewes wrote to Blackwood again, telling him of the author's discouragement, and that gentleman immediately offered to start printing *Amos* in the January number of his magazine in order to prove his admiration of it and stimulate its writer. This letter "greatly restored the shaken confidence" of George Eliot, who was, as Mr. Lewes informed her editor, "more

[1] Cross, pp. 205-6. [2] *Amos Barton*, chap. ii.

anxious about excellence than about appearing in print," and "afraid of failure, though not of obscurity."[1]

The story won friends as soon as it appeared, and the author was particularly gratified by being likened to "dear old Goldie," saying that she did not "desire a better fate than to lie side by side with him in people's memories."

George Eliot very soon found that criticism could give her little help. Every character, every incident, every sentence almost was the result of careful thought and strong conviction. Suggestions as to small details of language she received willingly from her publisher, and readily acknowledged the wisdom of his advice on such points. But when he expressed a doubt as to the working out of a character she replied, "I am unable to alter anything in relation to the delineation or development of character, as my stories always grow out of my psychological conception of the *dramatis personæ*. . . . My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy. And I cannot stir a step aside from what I *feel* to be *true* in character."[2]

Blackwood proved an ideal editor for so sensitive, so easily discouraged a writer. His opinions were always welcomed, and his suggestions considered, whether they were adopted or not. The kindly relations between publisher and writer grew into a strong friendship, though it was not until after the appearance of the *Scenes* in book form that he was admitted into the secret of the authorship. The only other person who shared the secret was Herbert Spencer, who, in October, again urged her to write a novel, and was told in strictest secrecy that one was already begun.[3]

It does not need a very close study of George Eliot's novels to convince us that she worked through the strata of her experience in a very methodic fashion. In a letter to Madame Bodichon in 1859 she says, "At present my mind works with the most freedom and the keenest sense of poetry in my remotest past, and there are many strata to be worked through before I can begin to use, artistically, any material I may gather in the present."[4]

So in the *Scenes* we have the treatment of places and people and ideas connected with her childhood; in *Adam Bede* we make acquaintance with the scenes of her father's youth, as she would hear of them in her growing years; *The Mill on the Floss*, though the scene is changed again, gives us a fairly accurate conception of her own mental and spiritual experience as a child and young girl. Then, when she thought to turn

[1] Cross, p. 209. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 213. [3] Spencer, vol. i., p. 492.
[4] Cross, p. 283.

aside to a country and people that had no connection with her early youth[1] she paused awhile and gave us the beautiful though impersonal little story of *Silas Marner*, still dealing with the scenes of her girlhood. If I were bent on carrying out this theory without allowing exception, I might attempt to show that some features of Romola's characters were borrowed from her own early womanhood; for instance, the devotion to scholastic studies, though she knew that a scholar's life, pure and simple, was not the one for her; the tender, loving care for the old father, the ministering to sick and suffering for religion's sake, the overturning of confidence and great upheaval of soul when that religion seemed to fail her. Except for such traits as these *Romola* stands outside the direct line of advance in this direction.

After this book, of course, there is a great change in her writings, less of loving reminiscence and more of strenuous urging towards the good, yet *Felix Holt* takes us back to Warwickshire—back to Nuneaton, we might almost say—though the spirit of the story is quite different from that of the earlier ones.

In *Middlemarch*, though we do not see the charming old town of Coventry, we have a picture of provincial town life, as she learned to see it there, and in *Daniel Deronda* we come to people such as she might have known in London. Her poems and later novels, too, all bear the mark of the philosophic ideas in which she was interested in the last twenty years of her life.

Going back to the *Scenes*, we are taught to love the neighbourhood of her early home in *Amos Barton;* we see the parish church at which she was baptised, and its parsonage; we get a faint glimpse of the farmyard at Griff, through the kindness of Mrs. Hackit in inviting Dickey there; we see the Chilvers Coton workhouse—still a square, gloomy building, with a forbidding wall fronting a dreary little street, and still, as I write, bearing the inscription "College for the Poor, 1800." We also get a slight knowledge of George Eliot's father and mother through the main characteristics of Mr. and Mrs. Hackit. The Rev. Amos Barton suggested to all those who had known him the Rev. John Gwyther, who was also a "middling" man, and who rebuilt the church and had a lovely wife like the sweet Milly, a wife whom he too had to leave buried in the old churchyard when he went to another parish. The grave is near the chief entrance of Chilvers Coton Church and is pointed out to visitors as "Milly's grave." To a priest not unlike poor Amos, Marian had looked in her stormy, eager girlhood for teaching, and from the hands of Mrs. Evans had Mrs. Gwyther often received tender, friendly help.[2]

[1] Italy, in *Romola*.

[2] Not in her last illness, however, for Mrs. Evans died a few months before the curate's wife.

The outlines of the characters and the incidents of the story were reminiscences of long-past years[1]—Mrs. Gwyther had died shortly before Marian's seventeenth birthday—but George Eliot has thrown a charm over them. She has realised Wordsworth's desire to show simple and ordinary life beautified by a "colouring of imagination."

It is this basis of reality which forms the most marked distinction between *Amos* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*. Many people have felt the likeness of the two works, a likeness which consists mainly in simple, though cultured, grace of style, tenderness, gentle humour and moving pathos. Both stories have the same loose construction; in both, trouble after trouble falls upon the hero, but in the *Vicar* this heaping-up of calamities is carried too far to give the effect of truth, while in *Amos* we are quite ready to believe that these *Sad Fortunes* are part of a real life-story. Goldsmith is endeavouring to win our admiration for the Vicar's fortitude under his sorrows, George Eliot longs only for our pity and love, and it is not necessary for her to cut her way through an unmanageable mass of woes and bring in a happy ending by sheer defiance of all probability. Indeed, though we take it quite uncomplainingly, and love the book none the less, there is much idealisation and convention in Goldsmith's characters, and much improbability in his incidents, while *Amos* impresses us with its close faithfulness to life.

It is well known to all students of literature that the language of our poets and dramatists, even of our novelists, is not that of everyday life. Ordinary speech is too inexpressive, too diffuse, too stiff and inelastic a medium for our deepest and highest experiences. A literary language is especially necessary to a dramatist who must reveal a character through his own speech and that of other characters in the play; the novelist, though he also has need of it, may give us as much information as he wishes without the use of dialogue. George Eliot, especially in her earliest works, chose to make her readers acquainted with her characters chiefly through the descriptions which she herself gives of them, and only in a much less degree through their speech. It was thus possible for her to allow the words of her characters to approach more nearly than those of most novelists to actual realistic speech. It is just in the dialogue parts where most writers use the highest power of the literary language that she uses the lowest. In fact, in *Amos Barton* one might almost say that there is no heightening of language at all in the speech of her characters. There is a little softening of dialect and a choosing-out of the pithy parts of speech, and conversations are not allowed to ramble from the point as

[1] *Scenes from the George Eliot Country*, by S. Parkinson.

much as they might have done, but for the most part there is an extreme naturalness and almost perfect realism in the words actually spoken. In a drama this would produce a sketchy sort of character-effect. In George Eliot's work, however, this disadvantage is entirely done away with by the minute delineation of character and motives which she herself supplies, thus leaving her characters free to act as naturally as they please without any effort to reveal something more of themselves in every sentence. Of course there are serious drawbacks to this method. We have seen that Mr. Blackwood was rather troubled by it, but it was a method that suited George Eliot well with her wonderful power of minute analysis of character.

This careful delineation of personality, with all its attributes and habits and external appearance, goes right on to her last novel, though the extreme naturalness of speech in her characters is a mark of her earlier work. It is best seen in *Amos Barton*. Later, to get the highest possible perfection in her character-drawing, she makes more and more use of heightened language in the speeches, without lessening her own thorough analysis, and thus marks out every trait with extreme distinctness. This was hardly necessary, however, in dealing with the simpler natures on which she chose to make her first attempts. George Eliot had doubted her possession of dramatic power, and not entirely without cause. Her early habit of thinking much about herself and her experiences, while it gave her a power of keen penetration into the working of other minds, yet helped to make her attitude towards them somewhat self-centred. She had the ability to conceive good situations, and almost unequalled skill in describing them, but the more purely dramatic quality of writing dialogues was not yet so practised as to be habitual to her. Her strong sympathy and widening experience, combined with her thorough devotion to her art, helped her to strengthen this rather weak point, so that in her later novels it is scarcely, if at all, discernible, but I imagine that when writing *Amos Barton* she had a little difficulty in making her characters talk. The story is carried on largely by narrative, and occasionally when dialogue is introduced one has a feeling that the writer has just remembered that she must not do all the talking herself. In the best scene of all, the death of Milly, only a few short sentences are spoken, and from the moment of her death to the end of the story there are but three short speeches. It is evident that George Eliot is as yet far more at ease in narrative, and it is not surprising to notice that she finds dialogue easier in humorous passages, where there is generally some characteristic, such as the epigrammatic speech of Mrs. Hackit, to sustain than in pathetic passages, where the likeness of man to

man becomes more evident and small idiosyncrasies tend to disappear.

So beautiful is her style, however, that long passages of description or narrative do not weary the reader in the least. Though in later works it grew more massive and stately, it was never more pure and simple than in her first story. A "fresh" style, some critics called it, and it was so in two ways—as a distinctly individualised style, and as possessing a sweet power of refreshing and resting the reader.

She chose to fill this small canvas, as we might expect from what we know of her, with very ordinary figures, depending for the acceptance of her picture of life, not on the beauty of the forms there painted, but on the faithfulness of the painting and her power to arouse sympathy by a loving presentation. "At least eighty out of a hundred men," as she says, "are neither extraordinarily silly, nor extraordinarily wicked, nor extraordinarily wise," yet there is poetry and pathos, tragedy and comedy in their lives if we would only learn to see it. "Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance—in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share?"[1]

George Eliot always kept her tenderness for commonplace people, and they appear frequently throughout her work, but as time went on her interest in them had to struggle with the artist's desire to attempt larger, more varied and complex subjects. Never again did she take quite so insignificant a figure for the chief character in a story, but she was longing to see something like justice done, even in art, to this portion of humanity, and therefore she chose a hero whose only noticeable quality was that he was "superlatively middling." At the same time, however, she gratified herself by drawing one of the sweetest of women by his side. It is a mark of her wonderful power of compelling sympathy that in spite of our love for Milly, we by no means want the story to finish immediately at her death. Our interest in Amos has been roused sufficiently to make us anxious to know something of his future.

That George Eliot had power to rouse some emotions, those who had read her articles would know, but the humour and pathos of her story were much more powerful than could safely have been predicted. There is less of the satiric element and more of sweet humanity in the humour of *Amos* than in that of the *Essays*, and quite a new power is displayed in the witty remarks of Mrs. Hackit, and in the way in which the idiosyncrasies of the country people are depicted. The exquisite pathos was the quality that most affected her first readers, and Blackwood told her that "the men at the club seemed to have

[1] *Amos Barton*, chap. v.

mingled their tears and their tumblers together." There are many sentences and passages tremulous with tender feeling; and yet so simple that to quote them apart from their context is to do them violence and almost to destroy their beauty. Such is the little passage we read as we look on Amos making a last pilgrimage to the grave, accompanied by his eldest daughter: "Milly did not take all her love from the earth when she died. She had left some of it in Patty's heart."[1]

After finishing *Amos Barton*, George Eliot rested from writing for a few weeks, but on Christmas Day began *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*. During March, April and May of the next year she and her husband had a very enjoyable sojourn in the Scilly Isles, and there, sitting on the Fortification Hill, on a sunshiny May morning, the epilogue to *Mr. Gilfil* was written.

The scene of this second story is also laid very near her old home. "Cheverel Manor" is Arbury, the beautiful old hall near which she was born. As her father was steward to Mr. Francis Newdigate of Arbury some of her earliest memories were connected with the place. The previous owner of the hall, Sir Roger Newdigate, had devoted himself, his means and his time, with all the enthusiasm we see in Sir Christopher Cheverel, to the decoration of the hall in the Gothic style, and this work was completed before Marian's birth. The thought of this transformation seems to have caught her imagination. Probably as a child she often looked at the wonderful result and made pictures and stories for herself about the former inhabitants. When, as a woman, she chose the hall as the scene of a story, it was with those interesting forms who had peopled her girlish thoughts that she chose to tenant it rather than with the more ordinary persons whom she had known as its inhabitants. And, indeed, the picturesque Gothic beauty of the place, as one sees it across the large sheet of water which was dragged in the search for Tina's body, seems far more suited to curled and powdered heads and the more elaborate, late eighteenth century dress and the old-world grace of manners than to the plainer, less romantic dress and manners of a later day. The introduction of an Italian girl with Southern strength of passion in a small and delicate body adds another romantic element which completes the charm and transports us a long way in time and with a great difference in atmosphere from the homely Shepperton. Yet Shepperton is scarcely two miles from Arbury, and Tina's love-story is only separated from the death of Milly, which occurred in the same vicarage as that of the poor little bride of Mr. Gilfil, by some forty years.[2]

[1] *Amos Barton*, conclusion.

[2] The date of Tina's death is given as 1790; Milly's about 1831. (Mrs. Gwyther died in 1836.)

But the romance among ladies and gentlemen does not prevent us from enjoying the company of humbler persons. We are allowed to listen to conversations in the housekeeper's room, and the servants play their part in the story.

Probably George Eliot found *Mr. Gilfil*, with its "higher life" and byegone days, harder to write than her first story; it is not twice as long as *Amos*, but it took three times as long to write. There were some who, on its appearance, preferred it to its forerunner, but she herself, I think rightly, held that *Amos* was better than *Gilfil*.

The characters are still simple. Even Caterina, with all her overmastering passions and dread of wickedness, is not a complex character. George Eliot wisely resisted her publisher's suggestion to make her still more simple and more ordinary—from a fiction-reader's point of view—by substituting a dream for the dagger scene. It was essential to her conception of the character that Tina should feel that terrible impulse to kill, but she knew that such impulses often come to natures that could never perform the very act. This measuring of a person besides her own thoughts was one of the principal points of her story; it was a point which she felt the need of emphasising. So Mr. Gilfil lessens the terror of guilt in Tina's heart by his wise and tender words, "We mean to do wicked things that we never could do, just as we mean to do good and clever things that we never could do. Our thoughts are often worse than we are, just as they are often better than we are. And God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellowmen see us. We are always doing each other injustice, and thinking better or worse of each other than we deserve, because we only hear and see separate actions. We don't see each other's whole nature."[1]

This was one of the things that George Eliot longed to say. That way that God has of seeing us is the way the true artist has; it is the way George Eliot herself had.

The story is more closely knit together than *Amos*. It consists merely of the discovery of Captain Wybrow's baseness and its effect on Caterina and Maynard; the plot is simple, but it is quite whole. True, the introductory part, which is devoted to Mr. Gilfil as an old man, and the retrospect of Tina's life take up a good portion of the space, but they are not in the plot, they are before it, and the title, *The Love Story of Mr. Gilfil* is as well chosen as *The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton*, and prepares us for a retrospective view.

The "dramatic ventriloquism" which Lewes praised could hardly be better than in *Amos*, but here it is made more use of. If George Eliot had any difficulty with dialogue it was not that

[1] *Mr. Gilfil's Love Story*, chap. xix.

her characters refused to speak characteristically, it was that they were inclined to let her speak for them. Every person, even of slight importance, in her books has his own manner of speech, with individual differences which mark it distinctly from that of other people. This careful distinguishing of one person's speech from that of another is one of her most important means of characterisation. Without it she could scarcely have given to her smallest creations that distinct individuality which they all possess. There is no "first and second gentleman" with her. Each person is distinct and recognisable by much more interesting and natural a mark than a number or an empty name.

In *Mr. Gilfil* she seems to be still trying her powers of flight. That she could tell a story in an interesting way, with much humour and pathos and fine description, was already certain. Now she essayed the treatment of passion, and with considerable success. The love and jealousy of little Tina are convincingly drawn; there is no fault to be found in this work. Yet we are conscious rather of pity for the poor child than of thrilling sympathy with these passions. We do not suffer with Tina as we did with Amos; we stand just a little on one side; there is all the difference between pity and true sympathy in our attitude. Tina does not take her place among our most loved feminine friends from George Eliot's pages. She is an alien here as at Cheverel Manor. The chief women characters in both the preceding and the following *Scenes* are more to us than she, for both Milly and Janet have more of their creator in them than this little "black-eyed monkey."

The passion of love, however, is almost essential in the work of a novelist, and George Eliot treats it in her succeeding novels with ever-increasing power, though her portrayal of it never reached the perfection of her humour and pathos, nor of her marvellous exposition of human motives. Her tentative excursion into a past generation and a class with which she was not vitally connected was not soon repeated. No doubt she felt her strength less here than among the people and times she knew best, and though *Adam Bede* opens only eleven years later in date than the time of Tina's troubles—George Eliot is precise in giving dates to help the reader to a right perspective—the close connection of Adam's character and manner of life with that of her father, and the more homely people and ways there pictured, make it possible for her to move with confidence and decision, so that the story has a more convincing air of familiarity with all that is there treated. Yet, it was of human nature that she was writing—the human nature that was in its essence little different in Shakespere's day from that of hers and ours—and here and there we come across a passage which reveals some deep and true aspect of life in words of great

beauty. Such a passage is that in the epilogue, in which she tells us how it was that, after the loss of Tina, the open-eyed loving Maynard had grown into an "old gentleman of caustic tongue and bucolic tastes and sparing habits." "It is with men as with trees; if you lop off their finest branches, into which they were pouring their young life-juice, the wounds will be healed over with some rough boss, some odd excrescence; and what might have been a grand tree, expanding into liberal shade, is but a whimsical misshapen trunk. Many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow, which has crushed and maimed the nature just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty; and the trivial, erring life which we visit with over-harsh blame may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered."

Janet's Repentance gives us a picture of Nuneaton as it was in George Eliot's girlhood—a very different place from the thriving, growing town of to-day. Something of the story of Dempster and Janet she had heard in past years, and a persecution resembling that of Mr. Tryan had taken place there when she was a child about ten years old at a boarding school in the town. She was at the time imbibing evangelical ideas from her teacher, Miss Lewis, and no doubt the incident impressed her deeply. Far as she had travelled from those opinions, she still loved and honoured the genuine devotion and sincerity to which they were often attached, and had already remarked on the possibilities of the movement in the hands of a good and sympathetic novelist.

Her condemnation of the worst faults of which evangelicalism could be guilty did not prevent her from recognising the self-forgetting heroism and the wonderful regeneration of character for which, at its best, it was also remarkable. But in *Janet* she is not standing as its champion. "The collision in the drama is not at all between 'bigoted churchmanship' and evangelicalism, but between *ir*religion and religion. Religion in this case happens to be represented by evangelicalism."[1]

Blackwood was uneasy about the treatment of clerical matters, and also again suggested some alteration in the characters, from which she again shrank with sensitive pain, absolutely refusing to comply. "If I were to undertake to alter language or character," she wrote, "I should be attempting to represent some vague conception of what may possibly exist in other people's minds, but has no existence in my own. . . . As an artist I should be utterly powerless if I departed from my own conceptions of life and character."[2]

It must have seemed to her readers that she was bent on proving that a great variety of character may be found in a

[1] Cross, p. 224. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 224.

small town and its surroundings, for though she still chooses the familar district near her home, the characters in the story are very different from those of the earlier ones. Instead of a farmhouse, a vicarage, or a hall, we enter the bar of the "Red Lion" at Milby and listen to speeches displaying various degrees of ignorance, arrogance and intolerance. Dempster is her first portrait of a harshly disagreeable character, and his words make him known at once. He keeps his hearers subject to him by impudent flattery while he boldly denies any good in a hated object; he breaks every rule of logic, totally ignores the truth, and bids defiance to all temperance and fair play. Yet, in spite of his outrages on intellect and good feeling, there was in his speech a raciness, vigour and smartness, and a seeming disinterestedness that delighted his hearers—in short, George Eliot has presented to us a very successful electioneering style. The scene at the "Red Lion" cannot but remind one of that inimitable scene at the "Rainbow" in *Silas Marner*, though in humour and convincing power it falls considerably below it. It is not until we come to *Janet's Repentance* that we get any clear indication of that power which she possessed in a greater degree than perhaps any other English novelist—the power of describing the gradual perfecting or decay of a character. We meet Janet and Dempster at a point in their lives when it seems as though they must both go down to ruin together. We see them part, and just at the moment when Janet is about to be overwhelmed by disgrace and defeat, her good angel makes a desperate effort, the new uplifting force comes into her life through the sympathetic teaching of Mr. Tryan, and we watch her struggling with intense effort upwards again. We know almost at once that there is no hope for Dempster; we have watched his rapid deterioration until his good angel fled from him forever at "Mamsey's" grave, and it only remains to witness the horror of his utter ruin. This is drawn with terrible force; the frightful scene a little before his death is powerfully done, though its terror is not so penetrating as the pathos of that other deathbed scene in *Amos*. Dempster is a first attempt in the direction of Tito Melema, and though compared with that—in its own way—unequalled study of character, this is but a slight sketch, it is firmly and clearly drawn. We see every step in Tito's downward path. When we meet Dempster he is already well on the way, though occasionally we are reminded of the good that once was in him. We see little of the mental struggle that ends in failure—that is yet a somewhat difficult task—but in Janet's agony we see and feel the throes of one striving heroically to win her way, not merely back again to ordinary, thoughtless, everyday goodness, but to a higher life of tender and brave unselfishness, and striving

against difficulties both within and without her. It is very rarely that any great novelist has attempted to rouse sympathy for a woman with Janet's faults, but George Eliot wins it at once, even when we have only heard the conversation about her in Mrs. Linnet's parlour, and it deepens steadily to the last page.

Janet is certainly her noblest creation so far.[1] All her other characters have been drawn more or less from the outside, with a wonderfully accurate knowledge, it is true, but one gained more from observation and sympathy than from experience. Her own sufferings and soul-struggles had been of a different kind and of a different intensity from those of her earlier characters. The misery of self-dissatisfaction, however, was known to her in all its phases of dreariness and feverish frenzy; so was the passionate longing after something higher and better in life than she had yet known; and it is the treatment of these two emotions that does most to make Janet live. She is the first of that marvellous group of women characters who have such a startling power of life in them—women like Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke, whom we seem to know better than our own sisters—better, even, than ourselves.

This story is of importance also as containing a study of a relation which always interested George Eliot—a noble, womanly nature, touched with faults or some weakness—perhaps only the weakness of innocence which cannot adjust itself to this world and its ways—looking eagerly for guidance and comfort to a man of about her own age. It is a relation which comes often in her books; between Esther and Felix, Dorothea and Ladislaw, and Gwendolen and Deronda, and it is one that George Eliot particularly excels in representing. It shows to us a great need of her own soul. Exalted—or condemned—to wander on the lonely mountain-tops, with a heart full of yearning, passionate tenderness for those below, and a gentle nature, clinging, prone to submission, reverent, loving to sit at the feet of a teacher, it often happened that she could find no worthy object on which to expend these overflowing emotions; and, when calmer times had come, she loved to picture that healing, comforting reception of wise teaching which she in her youth had craved so strongly and often so vainly.

Probably George Eliot never found her ideal guide. Certainly none of these men who acted the part to her heroines seems quite satisfactory. Some of them are less noble than the women they teach, and some are not sufficiently real. Mr.

[1] She was pleased by a letter from Froude, who, she said, was only the second person (she wrote in March, 1859) who had shared "her own satisfaction in Janet." "I think she is the least popular of my characters," she goes on. It is strange to think this fine character was appreciated so slowly.

Tryan is one of those best suited to his particular task, but it is mainly his whole-souled self-abnegation that makes him so; it is not greatness of personality. Indeed, he is not a strongly individualised character. The trait that marks him out from other devoted priests is his keen sensibility to any form of pain or ridicule. This, more than anything, makes him human, and saves him from becoming a simple type of priest. Felix is too masterful, Ladislaw too inadequate, Deronda too etherealised, as though George Eliot, dissatisfied not only with all the heroes she had worshipped in life, and all those she had set up for the worship of her heroines, had determined to create one in whom there should be no flaw that could interfere with the adoration. The result is that we are expected to see him surrounded by ecstatic glory, as we see a hero in the first stages of hero-worship. In real life, unhappily, this passes, and the last stage of hero-worship is very different from the first. It is this insistence on keeping up this early attitude that wearies most readers. We want that period of unquestioning worship to pass naturally away; we get tired of being expected to admire a man at the same pitch for so long, and the character thus takes on itself an air of unreality. George Eliot never succeeded in drawing a perfectly satisfactory hero-priest—one who left nothing at all to be desired either by the moral or the artistic sense; perhaps it was because no human being can stand in such relation to another throughout a life. The function is taken up for a time and then laid down, and when the next crisis comes hero and worshipper have drifted away from each other, and for the new difficulty a new guide must be chosen, or one must find the way alone.

The humour of this story is also of another kind. Instead of the terse, illuminative speech of Mrs. Hackit or the witticisms of servants in a gentleman's family, we have the ludicrous effects produced by the inability of a narrow, inelastic mind to regard any subject from other than a material point of view. Mrs. Linnet is the chief humourist, though an unconscious one, in *Janet's Repentance*. It is not wit that makes her amusing, but her way of grasping at the few solid facts she knows, totally ignoring anything beyond them. She is afraid that Mr. Tryan's landlady doesn't cook well, and won't allow that her piety makes up for her defects. "Hard carrots 'ull be heavy on his stomach, piety or no piety. . . . The potatoes was as watery as watery. It's right enough to be speritial—I'm no enemy to that; but I like my potatoes mealy."[1] *Janet*, however, like the other *Scenes*, also contains a fair amount of satire which is distinctly inferior to the genuine wit and humour of George Eliot. Perhaps her use of it is due to her admiration

[1] *Janet's Repentance*, chap. xi.

of Thackeray. His is the only opinion she asks Mr. Blackwood to send her on the appearance of *Amos Barton*, and though she was not conscious of being a disciple of his, she certainly thought him the greatest of living novelists. His influence, though unconscious, appears in her use of satire, a weapon not particularly well suited to her, though wielded by him with consummate skill. Both her nature and style were too grave and serious for high success in this direction. She has not enough rapidity and lightness of movement. To use a dialect word, she is "lungeous." Her satire is caustic enough; sometimes a single passage presented out of its context would sound almost spiteful, but that is the fault of her skill, not of her mind. Indeed, the all-embracing nature of her sympathy was one obstacle to her success in this respect. Satire needs a touch of malice or temper to give it heat and quickness, or, if playful, a little sauciness and mischief, all of which were scarcely existent in her. When she tries to be ironical, instead of saying the exact opposite of what she means she sometimes goes a little too far, and misses the essential neatness. The result is that she often strikes the reader as rather heavy, and wanting in that flashing alacrity that makes the chief attraction of these styles of writing. Yet, the faults of the *Scenes* were few, and their power and beauty were great, so that when the series was closed and the three stories appeared in book-form it was not long before the public was aware that a new star had arisen.

Copies were sent to a few of the great literary men of the day, and one or two very welcome letters of encouragement reached the anxious author, including a characteristic one from Mrs. Carlyle, in which she thanked the writer for beguiling the pain of a physically wretched night, and drew a fanciful picture of "George Eliot" as a married, middle-aged man with a good many children and a well-beloved dog. She says it is "a *human* book—written out of the heart of a live man, not merely out of the brain of an author."[1]

The most interesting one was from Dickens. He, and he alone, guessed or strongly suspected the sex of the writer. "I should have been strongly disposed, if I had been left to my own devices, to address the said writer as a woman. I have observed what seemed to me such womanly touches in those moving fictions, that the assurance on the title-page is insufficient to satisfy me even now. If they originated with no woman, I believe that no man every before had the art of making himself mentally so like a woman since the world began."[2] The warm praise with which he begins and ends his letter must have been very cheering to her. Thackeray, however, though he spoke highly of the *Scenes*, said they were not written by a woman.

[1] Cross, p. 240. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

The secret was well kept. Just when the new book was steadily gaining fame a letter came from Mr. Bray wanting to know if Marian had written her novel yet. She answered by demanding when he would bring out his new poem—he never having dreamed of writing one—and though she, of course, does not declare that she has done no novel-writing, she begs him not to be guessing about what she is likely to do, but to be content not to know anything about it till she sees fit to tell him.

The success of the *Scenes* was just the right kind to reassure her. Though the book did not immediately become the idol of the public, it gained steadily on the minds of the best kind of readers, and brought her encouragement from men whose opinion she greatly valued.

It was necessary for her that she should succeed. So faint and tremulous, so nebulous, so almost non-existent was her confidence in her ability to put forth effectively the things she had to say, that cold neglect would probably have chilled her to silence. Not only must Lewes be at hand with encouragement, sympathy, admiration and strong belief in her, but she must also have assurance that the seeds she sowed had the power of rooting themselves in other minds. She could not have endured the heart-sickness of continued refusals from publishers, or of utter indifference on the part of the public.

One thinks of Charlotte Brontë in a dull Manchester street, with a heart full of misery and anxiety, receiving her *Professor* with a curt refusal from a publisher, and setting to work on *Jane Eyre*. *Jane Eyre* was none the worse for it, but if the *Scenes* had been as unfortunate as the *Professor* one wonders whether there would have been any *Adam Bede*.

For such success as her book attained she was deeply grateful, and that, more than anything else, helped her on with her new story.

CHAPTER XIV.

RELATION OF THE "SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE" TO THE REST OF HER WORK.

Unlike the first books of many writers the *Scenes* was a truly artistic production, showing few of the crudities of a first work. It is also characteristic. Mr. Call, a friend of George Eliot and writer of one of the most important articles on her life previous to the publication of Mr. Cross's book, says that "In them (the *Scenes*) lies the substance of the thought, the promise of the power afterwards so splendidly exhibited in her greater works,"[1] and one can hardly say that he speaks too strongly. The book bears her mark on every page. All the deep, warm sympathy with human suffering; the insistent effort to rouse interest in the ordinary people and things about us; the understanding treatment of the human nature in many varied phases; the high, yet sane ethical tone; the recognition of the laws that govern us as absolutely as other laws govern the rocks and stones and trees; the tender humour, bright wit, and exquisite pathos; the closeness to life as we all may know it, and the avoidance of the fantastical or bewildering—these qualities which are to be found in all her books are found in the first. Many favourite situations and subjects are also represented. The squandering of a noble woman on a less worthy man, for which she has been so often blamed, is a chief feature in her very first story, and is ably defended by her in the text,[2] though readers object less to this than to other instances—chiefly, I suppose, because it is an accomplished fact when the story opens. The recognition of the priestly function which one human being may bear to another I have already mentioned. This idea had its roots deep down in her heart; it had been a part of her thoughts from early girlish days, and grew in strength to the end of her life. The power she had of picturing a woman bearing great indignity and humiliation shows itself early in Janet. She never risked the approach of ridicule to one of her great characters; this demands the possession of a fine comic spirit, which was not hers. Meredith could do it to perfection; George Eliot wisely never attempted it. She took herself and her work with such intense seriousness that self-

[1] *West. Rev.*, July, 1881. [2] *Amos Barton*, chap. ii.

mockery or ridicule of her commendable characters was an impossibility, but she saved herself from the more terrible ridicule which often overtakes extreme seriousness by being supremely sane in her most intense earnestness.

Children and dogs she delighted in painting from the very first, and charming indeed are the pictures of Dickey and little Tina and Lizzie; but, like Totty and her brothers, they are grown-up people's children. They are almost pure product of observation, and if George Eliot had quite forgotten her own childhood she might have done them just as well, for we see no more of the working of the childish mind than we can see easily for ourselves; they are, to use an easy phrase, "done from the outside." It is not until we come to Maggie and Tom Tulliver that we get a feeling of revelation. In the *Scenes* it is only in Pattie, with the cares of a family settling on her frail shoulders, that we get glimpses of a skill which is yet almost unexercised. The rest of the children are drawn, as the dogs are, from friendly and close observation.

Her interest in village life, as she had known it, appears at once, though it does not yet reach its highest power of expression; so the portrait of Mrs. Hackit, good as it is, appears simply as a preliminary sketch besides the unmatched figure of Mrs. Poyser, whose wit is evidently the perfected fruit of Mrs. Hackit's pungent speech.

That there were portraits of real people, not merely a selection of characteristics, in the *Scenes* George Eliot afterwards admitted. "But," she said, "that was my first bit of art, and my hand was not well in. I did not know so well how to manipulate my materials."[1] I think that is why some of the characters have an air of effort, even a slight suggestion of rigidity. She was afraid to take her eyes off her model; these were persons whom she had known or known about in her girlhood, and since then they had been much in her mind, turned about this way and that, and examined and touched up over and over again. Traces of anxiety for accuracy seem to me visible in Amos, Dempster, Pilgrim and several of the smaller characters, such as Mrs. Patten and her niece. Janet, however, is surely a creation in the same sense that Shakspere's characters were creations. In *Adam Bede*, as George Eliot maintained,[2] there was not a single portrait, and she declared there should be none in the rest of her work. This resolution she appears studiously to have kept.[3]

If we pause to look at George Eliot at the end of 1857, when the *Scenes* were published in book form, we shall find her much altered, not only from the Calvinist of Nuneaton, but also from the storm-tossed Marian of Coventry days. She was now

[1] Cross, p. 278. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 278. [3] See pp. 146-47.

thirty-eight years of age. The agonies and loneliness of youth were past, and she had entered on a state of quiet, happy life. The chief need of her nature—someone to love and make happy, someone to whom she should be the dearest object on earth—was satisfied, and she had by her side one who tended and cared for her with an assiduous devotion which made life very sweet.

Her second great need was not unlike the first. It was the longing to bind herself by ties of affection and sympathy and service to her fellow-beings, and to this need also Mr. Lewes ministered by convincing her that such ties might be made, and by encouraging her whenever her heart began to fail. Life must have been to her a very bitter, dreary business if it had not been for her sense of rest and security in Lewes. That she felt this, and more, is evident from the dedication of her MSS. to him, each one accompanied by words of deep, grateful affection. The MS. of *Adam Bede* is thus inscribed: "To my dear husband, George Henry Lewes, I give the MS. of a work which would never have been written but for the happiness which his love has conferred on my life."[1]

Their life was very peaceful and very busy, and there were few interests or occupations that were entered into by one and not shared by the other. While she was writing the *Scenes* he was busy with his *Seaside Studies*, and both took a keen interest in each other's work. They walked and read together a good deal, their reading being chiefly from English and classical literature.

George Eliot had the experience of many ardent students—that life is far too short for all we would read and learn. In a letter to Miss Hennell at the end of the year she writes: "There is so much to read and the days are so short! I get more hungry for knowledge every day and less able to satisfy my hunger. Time is like the sibylline leaves, getting more precious the less there remains of it." (Then, with a quick turn from the pedantic-fantastical)—"That, I believe, is the correct allusion for a fine writer to make on the occasion." I imagine, then, she would hardly have rejoiced in Dr. Barry's name for her—"The Epic Pythoness of Science."[2]

But happy and interested as she was in her reading, she was still more happy and interested in her writing. Not that the actual occupation was a delight to her. It was often painful; for not only did she feel more acutely than most writers the serious responsibility of an artist and a teacher, but she was continually in doubt as to whether the work on which she was engaged would turn out worthless. When a story was finished, however, and set at a distance from her, she could rejoice in

[1] Cross, p. 257.
[2] W. Barry, D.D., *Heralds of Revolt*, "The Genius of George Eliot."

having been permitted to do a piece of good and lasting work. Yet how different the joy from that which she had imagined some twelve or fourteen years ago! Then she had longed for fame, and the thought of it had sent a tingling through her blood. It had been full of eagerness and pride, but now pride in the work for the workman's sake was dead; all that remained was an unselfish pride in the work done for humanity's sake; and, as with Janet, "Life to her could never more have any eagerness: it was a solemn service of gratitude and patient effort." The reward for which she had longed passionately in early womanhood "had been delayed until she was indifferent and could not enjoy it." The autumn had come, and the bright rain falling on the leaves could only give them some slight refreshing; it could not turn their gold to green, nor cause the sweet sap to move with joyous, youthful energy.

Her deep gladness in the sweet that had come forth out of the bitter is evident in two letters that she wrote in June—soon after she had begun *Janet*. The first is to her old friend and pupil, Mrs. Cash, and has this passage: "I am very happy—happy in the highest blessing life can give us, the perfect love and sympathy of a nature that stimulates my own to healthful activity. I feel, too, that all the terrible pain I have gone through in past years, partly from the defects of my own nature, partly from outward things, has probably been a preparation for some special work that I may do before I die. That is a blessed hope, to be rejoiced in with trembling. But even if that hope should be unfulfilled, I am contented to have lived and suffered for the sake of what has already been."[1]

And a day or two later she wrote to Miss Hennell: "If I live five years longer, the positive result of my existence on the side of truth and goodness will outweigh the small negative good that would have consisted in my not doing anything to shock others, and I can conceive no consequences that will make me repent the past. Do not misunderstand me, and suppose that I think myself heroic or great in any way. Far enough from that! Faulty, miserably faulty, I am—but least of all faulty where others most blame."[2]

It is evident that she has a longing for the full sympathy of her old friends of those far-off, soul-tossed, Coventry days. She would dearly like to show them her secret, but she only touches the veil that hides it, lingeringly, wistfully, yet determined not to draw it aside. I think her reason for keeping it hidden is evident from this second extract. She felt a power for good within her, but she knew that the world is inclined to look with a very severe eye on those who offer to do her good and make her better. George Eliot was afraid that if it were

[1] Cross, p. 223. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

known that her stories were written by a woman who had defied the conventional rules of morality their influence for good would be dangerously threatened. Now that the hope of making an impression on many minds had dawned, she had seriously looked again on that decisive act of her life, and had considered it afresh in the face of new responsibilities. As to whether she would have done the same if she had known then how great an influence she would wield, and what a stumbling-block this action would be to some of her readers, it is impossible to say. But she sincerely believed that her good work was only made possible by this action; and now, at the threshold of her wider life, she again declared her satisfaction with it.

At the close of the year she wrote in her journal: "My life has deepened unspeakably during the last year; I feel a greater capacity for moral and intellectual enjoyment. . . . Few women, I fear, have had such reason as I have to think the long, sad years of youth were worth living for the sake of middle-age"; and, concerning the *Scenes*, "I feel a deep satisfaction in having done a bit of faithful work that will perhaps remain like a primrose root in the hedgerow and gladden and chasten human hearts in years to come."[1]

[1] Cross, p. 235.

CHAPTER XV.

"ADAM BEDE": FROM THE END OF 1857 TO THE END OF 1859.

If it had not been for Mr. Blackwood's hesitating sympathy with the first part of *Janet's Repentance* we should have had a fourth Scene, the subject of it being *The Clerical Tutor;* but, as it was, George Eliot laid aside the idea, and on October 22nd, less than a fortnight after the completion of *Janet's Repentance*, she began *Adam Bede.* The *Scenes* had been a literary rather than a popular success, and the writer, rather unreasonably, as she admitted, longed for a wider approval, being "as much in need of sympathy from my readers as I am incapable of bending myself to their tastes." However, the success became slowly more pronounced, and when some gratifying morsels of praise come to her she notes them down thankfully in her journal, adding, "I wonder how I shall feel about these little details ten years hence, if I am alive. At present I value them as grounds for hoping that my writing may succeed, and so give value to my life; as indications that I can touch the hearts of my fellow-men, and so sprinkle some precious grain as the result of the long years in which I have been inert and suffering. But at present fear and trembling still predominate over hope."[1] This fear and trembling unhappily accompanied her work to the end, though the hope grew gradually stronger.

In April she and her husband went to Germany, where they proposed to spend several months. A few weeks before they set off, Mr. Blackwood called. "Well, am I to see George Eliot this time?" he asked. "Do you wish to see him?" questioned Mr. Lewes. "As he likes," Mr. Blackwood answered; "I wish it to be quite spontaneous." Mrs. Lewes left the room, her husband followed her, and she gave him permission to reveal the secret. "Blackwood was kind," she writes briefly.

At Munich they made many acquaintances—poets, artists, professors and so on, but the most interesting to them was Liebig, the chemist, with his hands bearing witness to his work in blackened nails and discoloured skin. These hands touched George Eliot's imagination; she was probably thinking of them

[1] Cross, p. 236.

when she noted that Adam's hands were hard and his nails broken. At this time she was learning to take a deeper delight in pictures, and very frequent visits were paid to the picture-galleries at Munich and at Dresden, their second resting-place, where she joined in the adoration of the Sistine Madonna.

In both towns she worked at *Adam Bede*, getting nearly to the end of the second volume at Dresden, where they made no acquaintances, and she wrote through the long mornings—rising at six—"with great enjoyment."

They returned to Richmond at the beginning of September, and on November 10th *Adam Bede* was finished. On the last day of that month she wrote a little history of the book, from which we learn that its writing gave her much pleasure and little of that pain and despondency that we hear of in connection with some later books. I think none of her works was written with greater ease than this; there are no signs of the misery of getting the work into a tight knot and being almost in despair about disentangling it again, no pausing in helpless distrust of her power to carry the thing through, no nervous dread of a fiasco. These artist's pains tormented her somewhat in *The Mill on the Floss* and much more in *Romola*. *Adam Bede*, happily, was free from them, though perhaps no other book of hers was so except *Silas Marner*. I think this was because the very scenery in which the story is laid has a soothing, almost idyllic, effect, and the scent of English country air refreshed her all the time; because, too, she set herself no scholarship to be kept blameless, no problem to solve, and no very complex characters to draw, with all their warring and antagonistic impulses; still more, it was because there was no picture to paint of a character made largely out of a portion of her own personality. Maggie Tulliver, Romola, and Dorothea all gave her pain, because in each she took part of her own being and blended it with other elements, shaped it afresh and gave it life.

"The germ of *Adam Bede*," writes George Eliot, "was an anecdote told me by my Methodist Aunt Samuel (the wife of my father's younger brother)—an anecdote from her own experience. We were sitting together one afternoon during her visit to me at Griff, probably in 1839 or 1840, when it occurred to her to tell me how she had visited a condemned criminal—a very ignorant girl, who had murdered her child and refused to confess; how she had stayed with her praying through the night, and how the poor creature at last broke out into tears and confessed her crime. My aunt afterwards went with her in the cart to the place of execution; and she described to me the great respect with which this ministry of hers was regarded by the official people about the gaol."

Afterwards, when she was writing the *Scenes*, she determined

to make the prison scene the centre of a story in which she would blend some recollections of her aunt and father. "The character of Dinah grew out of my recollections of my aunt; but Dinah is not at all like my aunt, who was a very small, black-eyed woman, and (as I was told, for I never heard her preach) very vehement in her style of preaching. She had left off preaching when I knew her, being probably sixty years old, and in delicate health; and she had become, as my father told me, much more gentle and subdued than she had been in the days of her active ministry and bodily strength, when she could not rest without exhorting and remonstrating in season and out of season. The character of Adam and one or two incidents connected with him were suggested by my father's early life; but Adam is not my father any more than Dinah is my aunt. Indeed, there is not a single portrait in *Adam Bede*, only the suggestions of experience wrought up into new combinations. When I began to write it, the only elements I had determined on, besides the character of Dinah, were the character of Adam, his relation to Arthur Donnithorne, and their mutual relations to Hetty—*i.e.*, the girl who commits child-murder—the scene in the prison being, of course, the climax towards which I worked. Everything else grew out of the characters and their mutual relations.[1] Dinah's ultimate relation to Adam was suggested by George, when I had read to him the first part of the first volume. He was so delighted with the presentation of Dinah, and so convinced that the reader's interest would centre in her, that he wanted her to be the principal figure at the last. I accepted the idea at once, and from the end of the third chapter worked with it constantly in view."[2]

Another suggestion from Mr. Lewes—that Adam should play a more active part and be brought into direct collision with Arthur—led to the fight between the two lovers of Hetty, which "came to her as a *necessity*" as she listened to *William Tell* at Munich. At the end of this account she writes of her book: "I love it very much and am deeply thankful to have written it, whatever the public may say to it."

When the *Clerical Scenes* had appeared, the inhabitants of Nuneaton and the district round it had recognised, to their astonishment, portraits of people and pictures of scenes that were well known to them, and George Eliot would scarcely have objected to their claiming Amos Barton and Mr. Pilgrim as fellow-townspeople, since she admitted that there were portraits in the book. But on the appearance of *Adam Bede* the same thing happened in the village of Ellaston, North Stafford-

[1] It is evident from this that George Eliot was not one of those writers who have the whole book planned out before they begin to write.

[2] Cross, pp. 254-55.

shire, and in the little town of Wirksworth, fifteen miles away, in Derbyshire; for the inhabitants recognised in Hayslope and Snowfield—the homes of Adam and Dinah—their own surroundings. So far they were probably justified, but they went on to insist that Adam *was* Robert Evans and Dinah *was* Elizabeth Evans, and a good example of the growth of myths is given in an article in the *Century Magazine*,[1] which speaks of a second visit to Wirksworth in 1842 of a week's duration—which George Eliot's history of the book shows did not take place[2]—of Marian Evans asking Mrs. Evans a multitude of questions about her spiritual experience and putting all this conversation down in a little note-book in her aunt's presence, and, finally, of her carrying off and copying for Dinah's sermon at Hayslope the notes of the sermon preached by Mrs. Evans on Ellaston Green, though George Eliot says she "never saw anything of her aunt's writing."

"How curious," she writes to Miss Hennell in 1859, "it seems to me that people should think Dinah's sermon, prayers and speeches were *copied* when they were written with hot tears as they surged up in my own mind."[3]

Mrs. Evans had been dead ten years when *Adam Bede* appeared, and as she lived to the age of seventy-four there could have been few persons living who remembered her in her youth, and, as George Eliot said, imperfectly instructed people have a vague, easily-satisfied notion of portraits. In spite of all objections the people of Wirksworth clung to their belief, and a tablet was erected in the Methodist chapel there "In Memory of Mrs. Elizabeth Evans (known to the world as Dinah Morris)."

The likeness between Adam and Robert Evans, Seth and Samuel Evans, Bartle Massey and the old schoolmaster of Ellaston was insisted on almost as strongly.[4]

There were "things" in *Adam Bede* about these, but not portraits, and it is not allowable to go to the characters of the book for information about the writer's near relatives. One must first be sure which characteristics were theirs before one can enjoy her artistic presentation of these traits as biographical,

[1] "Dinah Morris and Mrs. E. Evans," by L. Bulkley, *Century Magazine*, August, 1882.

[2] "I saw my aunt twice after this. (Mrs. Evans' visit to Griff.) Once I spent a day and a night with my father in the Wirksworth cottage, sleeping with my aunt. I remember our interview was less interesting than on the former time. I think I was less simply devoted to religious ideas. And once again she came to see me when father and I were living at Foleshill; then there was some pain, for I had given up the form of Christian belief, and was in a crude state of freethinking." (Letter to Miss Hennell, Blind, p. 113.)

[3] Blind, p. 114.

[4] Mr. Mottram tells us that Bartle Massey was actually the name of the schoolmaster at Ellaston.

and such an examination of the book would little profit us; certainly it would scarcely be in place here.

George Eliot's second work is a much finer one than her first. It suggests the full maturity of noble powers in a way that the *Scenes* do not, and is now probably the most widely read of her books. No work of hers, except *Silas Marner*, is so well-proportioned, so compact, so far above reproach in having its action "complete, entire and of a certain magnitude," though its unity has been questioned a little by some who look on the last book—chiefly concerned with the love of Adam and Dinah—as rather beside the real story. There is no waste of effort in attempting to astonish, the writer keeps closely to her subject, and if she ventures to pause and discuss with her reader the moral bearings of a situation or character she always throws a clearer light on some portion of the work. The lengthy account of the birthday feast is, perhaps, slightly out of proportion to the whole; but, like the chapter describing the walk to Church of the Poyser family, it could only be found fault with by those who care less about the atmosphere of a book—its scenery, topographical and human—than George Eliot did. No paragraph could be omitted without loss, for every one contains some of those delicate touches which only a keen and experienced sense can single out, but which, in the aggregate, make an immense difference to the effect on even a careless reader.

George Eliot was as precise and neat as a writer as Mrs. Poyser in her dairy. She would not allow any untidy, cumbersome litter of passages. An interesting effect of her love of exactness is noticeable in the care with which she keeps her reader informed as to the historical time of her stories. She tells us in what year these things happened, informs us of the date on the very first page, and keeps us in mind of it by allusions to the war—Napoleon and the French. Not only so, but throughout the book we are distinctly conscious of the season of the year, the month, even the day and the hour. It is probably a result of those years in a farmhouse, when every day of the week had its special work and the year was divided into fifty-two distinct sections by fifty-two Sundays—impressive for the great difference between them and working days—that the various days have so distinct a mark in *Adam Bede*. Indeed, anyone who attempts to tell a story of farm-life must needs observe the difference between one day and another, and no writer can give a convincing picture of the life of any working-people, whether in town or country, without marking the difference between the Sunday and the other days of the week. It is a time for leisure and free play of the individual, if not for worship.

So we are usually informed also of the hour of the day. We know what time Adam goes to work and comes home, when

we may expect to find the farmyard noisy, and when we may be sure of finding Mrs. Poyser in a clean, bright kitchen, with a restful quiet about it. George Eliot is untiring in all these details.[1] Her readers must not only see one or two or more characters acting out their parts, they must be conscious of the scene in which they act and the changes wrought in it by the months and days and hours. Her careful minuteness in these little points has a great deal to do with the true country charm of the book. She is always reminding us of what is going on around her characters; we see them all, not merely against a background of country and dimly sketched rural characters, but as distinctly connected with all their surroundings, though perhaps only unconsciously influenced by them. How different the book would be without this skilful treatment of such details can hardly be imagined; nor how different the effect of the scenes in the Chase if the writer had ignored the wonderful effects of the different lights at different parts of the day there. The account of Hetty's first secret meeting with Arthur would seem much altered if the following passage were omitted: "She thought nothing of the evening light that lay gently in the grassy alleys between the fern, and made the beauty of their living green more visible than it had been in the overpowering flood of noon."[2] The contrast presents itself so unobtrusively, yet so distinctly, between the green and golden glory she ignored and the "bright, hazy something" she eagerly turned to, the false imaginary beauty the attraction of which was to lead her to shame and crime.

Few people read *Adam Bede* without carrying away a more of less distinct impression of Adam's home, the thatched cottage surrounded by fields, standing in "a green valley with a brook running through it . . . overhung by low stooping willows," the brook in which Thias Bede met his pitiful death. It is all there yet, but the cottage is now slated, and one does not see the upright tidy figure of Lisbeth coming out from her clean kitchen, knitting in hand, to look for her boys. The most distinct impression of a place is that of the Hall Farm, especially of the spotless kitchen, with its polished oak clock-case and table, its pewter dishes, its glittering brass candlesticks, old Mr. Poyser's armchair by the fireplace and his son's three-cornered one standing near, and the dairy, cool, sweet, and fragrant with fresh butter, cheese and cream. The kitchen

[1] Closely connected with this is her habit of giving account of all the little movements and changes of attitude of her characters, especially in an important scene like Grandcourt's proposal to Gwendolen, when we know just how they sat or stood or looked at each other; their gestures, what Grandcourt did with his hat, etc. One is reminded of the minute stage directions of Bernard Shaw. The scenes must have acted themselves out in action as well as in words in her imagination.

[2] *Adam Bede*, chap. xiii.

door opens into the farmyard, which we now see sleeping in the mid-afternoon sunshine, with only indistinct murmurs of sound to be heard, now full of life and noisy with the barking of dogs, crowing and cackling of poultry, the screaming of geese, the shouts of men. All this remains vividly with us, inextricably twined with the story of Hetty, Dinah and Adam.[1]

As we expected from what we knew of her, and especially from the article on Riehl, George Eliot used this opportunity to leave a picture of the peasant as she knew him, and *Adam Bede* contains, besides the general background of peasant life, several little sketches of individual peasants which agree with what she had said of them earlier—dull-witted, rough-mannered, un-smiling creatures, yet capable of arousing interest in those who can love human nature for its own sake without any adornment of striking virtues or beauties. The harvest supper introduces us to several of Mr. Poyser's workmen; Kester, who curtsies along the lane as in the act of worship, with eyes turned upward in adoration of his own work on the ricks; Alick, the shepherd, of morose manners, but honest "even to the splitting of an oatgrain," yet stingy withal; good-tempered Tim, the waggoner, and big Ben Tholoway, with his petty thefts. One feels as though one knew all there was to be known of these simple people by the time the harvest supper is at an end, and when the musical talents of the company are exercised independently and simultaneously, we are ready to depart with Bartle Massey and Adam.[2]

Yet these peasants, if dull and of exceedingly limited mental horizon, have often a touch of poetry in their untaught natures, even as had the rude Caliban. A wandering gleam lights up the dimness of their souls, and makes us pause and wonder. It is

[1] The Hall Farm, also, still exists, but Mrs. Poyser's home is not an exact copy of Corley Hall Farm, an old house not many miles from Nuneaton, which, among many claimants, seems to be the original. The front of the house is very like it, only the windows are no longer patched with wood, and the lionesses on the gate-posts are griffins. The row of walnut trees still stands on the right of the house, or, rather, part of it does, for the trees are now very old, and some are blown down every winter in the storms. It is even said in the district that the ghosts of Dinah and Hetty have been seen at Corley Hall Farm.

[2] "The lyrism, which had at first only manifested itself by David's *sotto voce* performance of 'My Love's a Rose without a Thorn,' had gradually assumed a rather deafening and complex character. Tim, thinking slightly of David's vocalisation, was impelled to supersede that feeble buzz by a spirited commencement of 'Three Merry Mowers,' but David was not to be put down so easily, and showed himself capable of a copious crescendo, which was rendering it doubtful whether the rose would not predominate over the mowers, when old Kester, with an entirely unmoved and immovable aspect, suddenly set up a quavering treble, as if he had been an alarum, and the time was come for him to go off."—*Adam Bede*, chap. liii.

not so bright or frequent as that which makes beautiful the speech of the Irish peasant in modern Irish drama, but it comes often enough to assure us that it is not a mere accident but a vital part of the nature we are watching. With George Eliot's peasants, the effect is usually the result of some striving after expression, the using of a figure from nature to make more emphatic what is being said. So Lisbeth's speech is full of figures, sometimes domestic, sometimes taken from the country about her, but never far-fetched. She says Dinah looks "welly like the snowdrop flowers as ha' lived for days and days when I'n gathered 'em, wi' nothin' but a drop o' water an' a peep o' daylight,"[1] and she tells Adam "Thy old mother's got no right t'hinder thee. She's nought but th' old husk, and thee'st slipped away from her like the ripe nut."[2]

The ordinary peasant, however, cannot satisfy George Eliot as a chief character. Though we can see some trace of poetry in his life, he himself is not conscious of it, and the English clown for whom "the only realm of fancy and imagination exists at the bottom of the third quart-pot,"[3] is scarcely a subject to occupy the chief place in a novel; he is better fitted for the background, and George Eliot keeps him there, but refuses to dress him fantastically to make a pretty scene. We see him quite well playing his small part in the *Scenes*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* and *Silas Marner*, but for her chief characters she must have persons with more individuality, especially in her longer works. If she chooses a peasant's son or a farmer's daughter, they must have some noticeable traits of character—as Adam, or Maggie—or some striking distinction of person—as the fascinating beauty of Hetty Sorrel. The ordinary peasant has not received quite so full a treatment from her as he has from Mr. Hardy in his Wessex Tales.

Her favourite subject in the depicting of character is one with finer nature and nobler impulses than those around him, struggling to get himself in harmony with his surroundings, or more truly, to sound some note in his surroundings, mental and physical, that shall harmonise with himself. In her early books this is a man or woman in an obscure walk of life—a Janet, a Maggie, a Silas Marner—but when she had worked through these strata she still repeated the subject impressed so deeply on her by the long, yearning, and unsatisfied years of her youth, in Dorothea, Fedalma, and Deronda.

In *Adam Bede* we have no such picture. The upright, capable Adam has no craving for any work in life which he is not likely to get. Dinah, with all her beauty and purity, is content to labour in the mill and help others; only Hetty Sorrel is dissatisfied with her lot. Adam is not discontented. His

[1] *Adam Bede*, chap. xi. [2] *Ibid.*, chap. xxvi. [3] *Essays on Riehl.*

life at Hayslope would please him very well if he could get a good business of his own and win Hetty for a wife. "Adam, you perceive, was by no means a marvellous man, nor, properly speaking, a genius, yet I will not pretend that his was an ordinary character among workmen; and it would not be at all a safe conclusion that the next best man you may happen to see with a basket of tools over his shoulder, and a paper cap on his head, has the strong conscience and the strong sense, the blended susceptibility and self-command of our friend Adam. He was not an average man. Yet such as he are reared here and there in every generation of our peasant artisans—with an inheritance of affections nurtured by a simple family life of common need and common industry, and an inheritance of faculties trained in skilful, courageous labour; they make their way upward, rarely as geniuses, most commonly as painstaking, honest men, with the skill and conscience to do well the tasks that lie before them. Their lives have no discernible echo beyond the neighbourhood where they dwell, but you are almost sure to find there some good piece of road, some building, some application of mineral produce, some improvement in farming practice, some reform of parish abuses, with which their names are associated by one or two generations after them."[1]

Such a man was Marian's father, and one or two such honest, skilful workmen she may have seen and respected during her girlhood. For the rest, Adam is not faultless; he is peppery and somewhat prone to judge harshly. He finds it difficult to forgive faults which he could never have been guilty of, and because, once convinced that a thing is wrong, he no longer wishes for it, he cannot understand a man who drifts into wrongdoing. Adam could never drift. At the same time he could not be merciful and tender to the frailties of others, not till his keen suffering and the sad misdeeds of one whom he loved too well to condemn had taught him that other sinners may be treated with compassion.

One feels that Adam's sternness was a frame of mind well known to her, but it belonged to the far-past years at Griff. Then she had found it difficult to believe that a poor parson who had contracted a bad habit at the close of his life could be in heaven. The harshness of the creed she adopted made her look sternly on all wrongdoers and forbade compassion to take its free way in her heart, lest her own soul should become less perfect, or lest that tender feeling should make her rebellious against the unmerciful doctrine of election. Of course Adam's hardness was part of his young nature; hers was rather an incrustation. So with Arthur's unsteady,

[1] *Adam Bede*, chap. xix.

vacillating mind. George Eliot knew what it was to be unable to come to a decision, to be turned this way and that by slight influences; she had alluded when at Geneva to her chameleon-like nature, but with Arthur this uncertainty arose from weakness joined to selfishness; in her, from lack of confidence in herself and a tendency to trust the judgment of others.

But she had experienced sternness and the discomfort of vacillation. Her power lay in the wonderful, sympathetic imagination, which could take hold of some slight tendency in her own mind—one, perhaps, long overcome—put aside all circumstances which, for her, held it in check, and, making a new environment for it, see it work uninterrupted and become a leading, ruling power. I think that this gift must have alarmed her in her younger days when, shutting herself up for a brief space with some passion or fault, she saw it rise to its full strength, bringing about some terrible consequence, and trembled with alarm, as Tina did, not realising that there were other forces in her nature that would forbid such a conclusion. Most people experience an almost exhaustive range of feeling during their lives; the most tender-hearted woman may feel a sudden, dim impulse to crime, the hardest criminal a passing attraction towards brave self-sacrifice. These things, for most of us, pass with a momentary astonishment. It is the ability to seize them and grapple with them, refusing to let them go till the truth is won and their name and strength are known, that makes so large a part of the wise skill of a close student of man. It is this that gives depth to the artist's conception, as his minute and accurate observation gives it breath.

Dinah is to me a more wonderful creation than Adam. There went but little personal experience to the forming of this character, for George Eliot's evangelical phase knew nothing of the serene calm and unconsciousness of self which shine so mildly in Dinah. The sweet woman preacher was not a typical Methodist. There was no ranting, no extravagance in her preaching, yet there was all the zealous ardour of the most fervid of her sect. She is not one of the strictest of the Methodists; her religion is love. From the first there have been readers who object that she is too saintly. The sweet, pale, flower-like face, the clear treble voice, the unchanging attitude of self-devotion to religion—practical religion as well as emotional—going even beyond, as Mrs. Poyser complained, the command to "love thy neighbour as thyself," the air of purity and holy calm which always surrounds her—all these make her appear to some rather too good to live. It is not the fashion now to admire immaculate heroes and heroines, because, we say glibly, such persons are not true to life. Yet how many saintly men and women the world has known whom

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everyone loved and revered, and whose faults were so small as to be invisible to human eyes. Women as spotless as Dinah have lived to keep alive reverence, and George Eliot would not put a superficial smirch on such a character to gratify the cry for imperfection.

But probably our real objection to faultless people is that we, the vast majority of us, are not perfect, and those who are not bound to us by frailty of soul as well as of life cannot move our hearts because an important point of contact is missing. Or we dislike, not the faultless people themselves, but the portraying of them, because the greatest interest of all—the better part of man struggling against the lower, the eternal battle of good and evil, or else the mere æsthetic variety of light and shade—is wanting.

Dinah is a beautiful creation, but she is made of fine clay—clay of the earth, but of a rare kind. Adam was not quite of the stuff of commonplace men. She is much less so, and the lines of her character are so severely pure and simple that we look at her without any of the surprise and questioning that form so large a part of our interest in characters of fiction.

Another point that has caused much discussion is the marriage of Dinah and Adam. In an article in the *Spectator*,[1] written many years ago, the writer (probably R. H. Hutton) expresses disappointment that the secular Adam should cast a shadow over the saintliness of Dinah, and many a writer has since expressed a similar dissatisfaction with the marriage. George Eliot told Mr. Blackwood, a few months after the publication of *Adam Bede*, that Sir Edward Lytton thought the two defects of the book were the dialect and Adam's marriage with Dinah. "But, of course," she says, "I would have my teeth drawn rather than give up either."[2] This feeling of unsuitableness is chiefly the result of our religious education, which sets secular and saintly at two opposite poles. It is an unnatural division; it condemns itself when it regards a loving, happy marriage as an eclipse of the saint. But to George Eliot they were not so opposed. Through all the varying phases of religious opinion she had at last reached the state of mind from which she could look at religion, not as a supernatural revelation, nor as an abhorrence unnecessary and unhuman, fit to be flung away. The feeling of antagonism had passed, and now she could value religion for what was human in it, and the purely human aspect of it became the only one for her. For some of us it may be like the marriage

[1] "The Idealism of George Eliot and Mr. Tennyson," *Spectator*, Dec. 2nd, 1871.

[2] The dialect had already been "toned down all through in correcting the proofs" as she could not keep it subdued enough in writing (Cross, p. 257).

of earth and heaven. Meredith's line about the winging of "*our* green to wed *our* blue" brings it a little nearer, but to her all the religion that was the life of Dinah was purely human, and there was nothing unpleasing in the union. Perhaps for many readers, as the superhuman element in religion wanes, the gulf between Adam and Dinah will become narrower.

There is, however, another reason for the objection, and a more lasting one. The reader is not sufficiently prepared for the later love of Adam nor for the love of Dinah. In the absorbing interest of Hetty's flight and trial we lose all thought of the possibility of these things, even if we had ever imagined them, and the new love-story comes upon us as a surprise. Indeed, the newness of this interest makes the last book stand apart from the rest as the last act of the *Merchant of Venice* from the first four.

Her treatment of the Methodist religion is full of sympathy. She shows us the admirable and lovable characters who hold to it, as well as the pious, slovenly dissenting woman who had troubled her mind so much twenty years ago. Dinah's sermon and prayer are very beautiful, full of the noblest emotions that Christianity gives, voiced in exquisitely simple language. The effect of her exhortations on the shallow nature of Bessy Cranage is very effective, and supplies a necessary light on another side of the movement. Hymns are an important part of religious life, especially when the religion is one of emotion, and they are quoted several times; indeed, it is doubtful whether the most earnest Methodist could find any fault with her presentation of his worship.

Yet those who have travelled along the road that she had trodden recognise signs—here and there in distinct passages on which the finger can be put, and also in the whole effect of the book—that it is written by one who has freed herself from all constraining dogma and writes from sympathy, not as a partaker in the religion.[1]

The fine passage which I quote is reminiscent of Feuerbach. Indeed, I think she still found much pleasure and satisfaction in his philosophy of religion.

"What a glad world this looks like, as one drives or rides along the valleys and over the hills! I have often thought so when, in foreign countries, where the fields and woods have looked to me like our English Loamshire—the rich land tilled

[1] Even so, there were many to object to the care she had lavished on a faithful treatment of Methodism. "The specific forms of religious life which have made some of the grandest elements in human history are looked down upon as if they were not within the artist's sympathy and veneration and intensely dramatic reproduction." (Letter to Mr. Blackwood, Cross, p. 288.)

with just as much care, the woods rolling down the gentle slopes to the green meadows—I have come on something by the roadside which has reminded me that I am not in Loamshire; an image of a great agony—the agony of the Cross. It has stood perhaps by the clustering apple-blossoms, or in the broad sunshine by the cornfield, or at a turning by the wood where a clear brook was gurgling below; and surely, if there came a traveller to this world who knew nothing of the story of man's life upon it, this image of agony would seem to him strangely out of place in the midst of this joyous nature. He would not know that hidden behind the apple-blossoms, or among the golden corn, or under the shrouding boughs of the woods, there might be a human heart beating heavily with anguish; perhaps a young, blooming girl, not knowing where to turn for refuge from swift-advancing shame; understanding no more of this life of ours than a foolish lost lamb wandering farther and farther in the nightfall on the lonely heath; yet tasting the bitterest of life's bitterness. Such things are sometimes hidden among the sunny fields and behind the blossoming orchards; and the sound of the gurgling brook, if you come close to one spot behind a small bush, would be mingled for your ear with a despairing human sob. No wonder man's religion has much sorrow in it; no wonder he needs a suffering God."[1]

We read this as we are made acquainted with Hetty's secret dread: we see her setting out to buy wedding things at Treddleston, and trying to find courage to drown herself instead. It gives us an idea of the breadth and strength of George Eliot's sympathy with all human creatures when we find her moved to such deep feeling by the misfortune of "a little trivial soul like Hetty's, struggling amidst the serious, sad destinies of a human being," a girl who, as her aunt said, was "no better nor a cherry wi' a hard stone inside it."

Our own interest in Hetty never wearies for all the small, hard, selfish little soul that is hers. We are made to care for her, and to follow with intense interest all her story; we seldom think of being angry with her. Yet George Eliot points out that there was a striking resemblance between the little hopes and anxieties of Hetty and those of the stout, fat-cheeked, ignorant and vain Bessy Cranage. "The advantage, perhaps, would have been on Bessy's side in the matter of feeling. But then, you see, they were so very different outside! You would have been inclined to box Bessy's ears, and you would have longed to kiss Hetty."

It is the fascination of Hetty's beauty that helps us to forgive her naughtiness. From the moment we see her in Mrs. Poyser's dairy turning and patting the butter with pretty movements of

[1] *Adam Bede*, chap. xxxv.

head and arms, with her great, lovely dark eyes, capable of expressing so much more than she could feel, her dark hair curling in delicate tendrils about her ears, her white, round neck, and all the delicious, kitten-like beauty of a soft, round, young thing, we understand Adam's conquest and his inability to blame a lovely creature made only to be admired and loved and petted. This fascination is never allowed to cease. George Eliot succeeds wonderfully in keeping Hetty's charm always before us, and communicating the feeling that such beauty would awaken in reality. It heightens the pathos of her lonely wanderings; it deepens the terror of the doom likely to overtake her. There are few passages in any novel equal, in their kind, to the masterly description of Hetty's pitiful ramblings. Only the flight of Jane Eyre surpasses it in vital power.

The scene in the prison, towards which the writer had been working all along, though admirable, is not quite so well written; it had perhaps been thought over too often. Perhaps one reason that this scene, powerful and beautiful as it is, does not strike us as the finest in the book, is the stillness of Dinah's compassion. Hetty is as human a sinner as could be, but, in this scene, though in scarcely any other, Dinah is a ministering angel rather than a mortal helping a poor fellow-sinner; a priestess rather than a sister. At any rate, it is Hetty's confession, with all the wonderful understanding of the workings of the hard, narrow little nature that interests us most, not the ministry of Dinah. The mind turns to that summer evening at the Hall Farm, less than a year ago, when the two girls stood together, making a strange contrast in the mingled twilight and moonlight. "Hetty, her cheeks flushed and her eyes glistening from her imaginary drama, her beautiful neck and arms bare, her hair hanging in a curly tangle down her back, and the baubles in her ears. Dinah, covered with her long white dress, her pale face full of subdued emotion, almost like a lovely corpse into which the soul has returned charged with sublimer secrets and a sublimer love."[1] It seemed then that they could never be brought near together. Only one thing could do it—some great and terrible need on Hetty's side and the offering of Dinah's love when she had nothing else in this or any other world to cling to.

The journey in the fatal cart to the place of execution, and the arrival of Arthur at the last moment with a reprieve, has been censured as sensational. George Eliot, of course, never aimed at sensation. When a scene like this appears, we should understand that she has tolerated the sensation for the sake of something else that she could not have apart from it. The sensational elements are kept as much in the background as

[1] *Adam Bede*, chap. xv.

possible, here and elsewhere: the whole scene does not occupy a page. Why not have let the reprieve come sooner? It seems to be simply because this journey in the terrible cart had remained in her mind as the crowning-piece of her aunt's devotion to the wretched culprit, and she could not bring herself to part with the corresponding incident in the story of Hetty and Dinah. The thought of the two passing slowly through the gazing crowd, Dinah absorbed in selfless prayer; carrying her devoted service to the furthest possible point; Hetty clutching her tremblingly—this was a vital part of her conception of the young Methodist's ministration, and must be retained even at the cost of a little sensation, which, after all, occupies only a very few lines.[1]

George Eliot never again drew a Hetty or a Dinah, or any character very like either of them. But the character who first made *Adam Bede* famous was Mrs. Poyser, whom Mr. Buxton quoted in the House of Commons a few weeks after its publication. "It wants to be hatched over again and hatched different." Mrs. Poyser's delightful wit sparkles most pleasantly through the book. Her clever sayings are not, we are assured, remembered proverbs, but fresh from the author's own mint. Her speech, like Lisbeth's, is full of figures, but it is shot through and through with lightning-like wit. One would like to linger over it, turn the pages and quote sentence after sentence of keen, epigrammatic sayings, or to draw her again with her pale face, active figure, and sharp temper; her habit of scolding the girls and her nieces as a duty, her quick transitions from scathing satire to tender motherly sweetness as her eyes fall on Totty, her reverence for her "betters"—and her ever-memorable attack on the Squire—her perfection as a farmer's wife, her discernment in the matter of shorthorns, and, still more, her unexpected excess of mercy over her good-tempered husband when the news of Hetty's disgrace comes.

There are many other characters in *Adam Bede* on which, if this were simply an independent criticism of the book, I should like to dwell. I should conjure up the image of cheery Mr. Poyser with his two boys "looking as much like their father as a very small elephant is like a very large one"; the realistic portrait of fat, contented Totty; the cynical woman-hater, Bartle Massey, and the old-fashioned, respected and beloved parson, Mr. Irwine, with his grand old mother. Reluctantly I

[1] The only other way was to let Hetty suffer the extreme penalty, and that would have been too much out of harmony with the rest of the book, which gives no suggestion of this harsh violence. We are prepared for it in Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and though the execution of Tess does much more violence to our sense of justice than that of Hetty would have done, it does not offend our sense of artistic truth.

leave them and turn to a matter which concerns our subject more nearly, as it tells us more of the writer's deeper thoughts and strong, earnest beliefs—the teaching of *Adam Bede*.

There are three lessons which George Eliot is always teaching; as regards oneself—the wisdom of unembittered resignation to the inevitable; as regards others—the duty of loving sympathy; as regards oneself and others too—the might of the inexorable law which rules our lives and its retributive power. *Adam Bede* lays strong emphasis on the two last. Perhaps no novelist has insisted so unceasingly and so powerfully on the doctrine of Nemesis.[1] It is presented in every book, from the first to the last. In the *Scenes* there is mercy mixed with it. She writes there: "We reap what we sow; but Nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours,"[2] but later it has a sterner, more terrible aspect. As Mr. Call has said,[3] the Nemesis of consequences is intelligible in *Adam Bede*, but in *Daniel Deronda* it becomes "a daunting, intimidating sense of latent, inexplicable wrong."

In *Adam Bede*, however, it is clearly and strongly set forth. One feature after another is brought out in the speech of various characters and in the writer's own comments, and the whole story of the book is impregnated with it. "There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for," says one of her characters, and we see Arthur's absolute powerlessness to make up for the wrong done to Hetty and her people. Adam told Arthur, "I've seen pretty clear, ever since I could cast up a sum, as you can never do what's wrong without breeding sin and trouble more than you can ever see." And George Eliot dwells on the power a wrong once done has to force us on to another wrong. "Our deeds determine us, as much as we determine our deeds." And the deed once done, no amount of repentance will kill it, no power in heaven or earth interferes with its consequences. "Consequences are unpitying," says Mr. Irwine. "Our deeds carry their terrible consequences quite apart from any fluctuations that went before—consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves."

When the kind-hearted rector finds Adam passionately crying out against the cowardice of a man who can sin, knowing that the punishment will fall on somebody else, he utters another grave, sad truth: "There is no sort of wrong deed of which a man can bear the punishment alone; you can't isolate yourself and say that the evil which is in you shall not spread.

[1] "We have found, in her teaching, the enforcement of the doctrine of consequences, more richly illustrated, more variously applied, more scientifically stated, than ever it was before."—Mr. Call, *West. Rev.*, July, 1881.

[2] *Janet's Repentance*, chap. v. [3] *West. Rev.*, July, 1881.

Men's lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe; evil spreads as necessarily as disease."

The terrible vitality that is in evil is deeply impressed on the reader by the ruin of Hetty's life, the blight that fell on Arthur's, and the cruel suffering of Adam, the Poysers and Mr. Irwine. That good deeds are also undying and their consequences just as certain is not definitely taught, though the pure ministration of Dinah gives us some glimmering of it. When George Eliot has shown what is to be dreaded she does not so much comfort us by showing what is to be hoped as inspire and nerve us by showing what is to be done. She knows well that if every heart were filled with the intense sympathy which animated hers, the suffering in the world would be tremendously lessened, and so she cries for an increase of this feeling and never ceases her demand. It must be extended to human beings as such; not to the wise and good and beautiful, but to all. And so she gives us a story of the lives of humble people and shows how their joys and sorrows have poetry and pathos, how they are moved by deep passions, are swayed by slight impulses, act nobly or meanly, live lives quite as full of interest as kings and leaders. Her pages are full of beautiful passages of eager pleading for the extension of sympathy to these people whose lives are so real and natural, so free from the incrustation of outward customs which make men seem so much alike, yet so bound by the hoary customs, few, but strong, which rule their society. I will give only one or two quotations, and if I choose the best it must needs be the well-known. "All honour and reverence to the divine beauty of form! Let us cultivate it to the utmost in men, women and children—in our gardens and in our houses. But let us love that other beauty too which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy. Paint us an angel, if you can, with a floating violet robe, and a face paled by the celestial light; paint us yet oftener a Madonna, turning her mild face upward and opening her arms to welcome the divine glory, but do not impose on us any æsthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid, weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world—those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of onions. In this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque, sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which would only fit a world of extremes. Therefore, let Art always remind us of them; therefore, let us always have

men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representation of commonplace things—men who see beauty in these commonplace things and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them. There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities. I want a great deal of these feelings for my everyday fellow-men, especially for the few in the foreground of the multitude whose faces I know, whose hands I touch, for whom I have to make way with kindly courtesy."[1]

She has much to say of the work of pain in the human heart and its connection with sympathy. After Adam's keen suffering has begun to abate, she writes that sorrow does not pass away as if it had never been. "Let us rather be thankful that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy—the one word which includes our best insight and our best love."[2]

There we have a chief note of her teaching. It is not love she asks us to give our fellows so much as sympathy. Love may be clumsy or foolish in its zeal; only a tender sympathy can so delicately give comfort and avoid giving pain. A downward-looking love tends towards charity—in the harsher sense of the word. A sweeter, more perfect form of love grows up with a sympathetic insight. George Eliot looked on the widening and intensifying of sympathy as the chief work of all the arts. It was a matter for much consideration to her that we understand each other so little, know so little of the thoughts even of those nearest us, and yet are so dependent on them, not only for the conveniences of life, but for our own moral being. We do not know how good or bad we are till we hear it from their lips or see it in their eyes. "Nemesis can seldom forge a sword for herself out of our consciences—out of the suffering we feel in the suffering we may have caused; there is rarely metal enough there to make an effective weapon. Our moral sense learns the manners of good society and smiles when others smile; but when some rude person gives rough names to our actions, she is apt to take part against us."[3]

She would recommend us to find the right, not by exhaustive introspection—she had tried that and found it wanting—but by seeing our acts with the eyes of others as well as with our own. Adam, with his strong, practical good sense, often speaks with her voice on these matters. "There's such a thing as being over-spiritual," says he. "We must have something beside Gospel i' this world. . . . But t'hear some o'them preachers you'd think as a man must be doing nothing all's life but shutting's eyes and looking what's a-going on inside him."

[1] *Adam Bede*, chap. xvii. [2] *Ibid.*, chap. l. [3] *Ibid.*, chap. xxix.

Adam feels bound to do God's will, but after worrying for a while over some texts and doctrines he decides that this sort of thing only makes one "coxy and conceited," that God's will must certainly include good carpentry, and that that is what chiefly concerns him.

"I've seen pretty clear, ever since I was a young 'un, as religion's something else beside notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing—it's feelings."[1] By loving and rejoicing and sorrowing ourselves we get a knowledge that will teach us to be tender and helpful. "The more knowledge a man has, the better he'll do's work; and feeling's a sort o' knowledge."

But Adam is not without his vision. We may say it is superstition, and recall his belief in the mysterious tapping of the willow-wand heard when he worked through the night at the coffin and his father was drowning in the brook near by. George Eliot herself knew what this experience of touching the verge of the unknown was; she felt the force of its ancient connection with religion. In her last novel, Gwendolen experiences it in those visitations of terror which are all the more frightful to her because they are wholly unintelligible and have not yet connected themselves with notions of God or of good and evil. To Adam they are equally mysterious, but he puts them down as signs of the spiritual in religion.

"There's things go on in the soul, and times when feelings come into you like 'a rushing, mighty wind,' as the Scripture says, and part your life in two a'most, so as you look back on yourself as if you was somebody else. There are things as you can't bottle up in a 'do this' and 'do that,' and I'll go so far with the strongest Methodist ever you'll find."[2]

Adam, however, was not inclined to pry into these things. "I found it better for my soul to be humble before the mysteries o' God's dealings, and not be making a clatter about what I could never understand."[3]

This was a lesson that George Eliot herself had never learnt as a Christian. Tormented by the conflicting desires for full, clear knowledge and for tranquillity of soul in her religion, she had made for herself such a "clatter" that peace was impossible till she let the whole thing go. Only now, when all that pain of unrest was far enough past to have turned into sympathy, could she be still and acknowledge that there was much mystery that she could never hope to fathom, and look with loving, sympathetic eyes on those who, standing in front of the small lamp of time, saw a mighty Being in the shadow cast by themselves on the great void.

In a few weeks from the publication of *Adam Bede* the

[1] *Adam Bede*, chap. xvii. [2] *Ibid.*, chap. xvii. [3] *Ibid.*, chap. xvii.

English readers knew that a great writer had risen amongst them. Most of the reviews praised it—some wisely, some unwisely, few in a manner quite satisfactory to the writer and her husband. It is curious to note that one by Montégut was the most acceptable to her, yet it was very long before the French could be brought to read her at all. More pleasing than the reviews were the kind and exhilarating words that came to her from literary people. One of her greatest triumphs was that Mrs. Carlyle found herself "in charity with the whole human race" when she laid the book down. Charles Reade said it was "the finest thing since Shakspere." Sir Edward Lytton praised it; Herbert Spencer wrote "an enthusiastic letter," saying he felt the better for reading it; Dickens wrote "the noblest, most touching words," telling her that the reading of *Adam Bede* made an epoch in his life, and from Mrs. Gaskell came "a very beautiful letter" saying that she must tell the author "how earnestly, fully and humbly" she admired her books. "I never read anything so complete and beautiful in fiction in my life before," she adds.

Perhaps the letter that gave her most joy was one from an old friend, Madame Bodichon, who, away in Algiers, had read extracts in the reviews and known the book for hers. "You are the first friend who has given any symptom of knowing me—the first heart that has recognised me in a book which has come from my heart of hearts," she wrote in return. The eyes of her Coventry friends had been blinded by a "discovery" that "George Eliot" was a native of Nuneaton, a certain Mr. Liggins, who, after a little hesitation, accepted the glory thrust upon him and the subscriptions given to a poor genius. The real George Eliot had therefore the amusement of writing to Sara Hennell about Liggins and her books, she herself wearing the "cloke to goe invizible."[1] When, however, the growth of the Liggins rumour made self-discovery a necessity, she met her three old friends in London and astounded them by revealing her secret.[2]

The greatness of the success made her grave. "Shall I ever write another book as true as *Adam Bede?*" we read in her journal. "The weight of the future presses on me and makes itself felt even more than the deep satisfaction of the past and present."[3] Yet she says to Mr. Blackwood:[4] "I sing my Magnificat in a quiet way, and have a great deal of deep, silent

[1] "Mr. Lewes has read *Adam Bede* and is as dithyrambic about it as others appear to be, so *I* must refresh my soul with it now as well as with the spring-tide. Mr. Liggins I remember as a vision of my childhood—a tall, black-coated, genteel young clergyman-in-embryo." Cross, p. 269.

[2] I was amused, when walking past Griff last spring, to see going by a tradesman's van bearing the name of Liggins, of Nuneaton.

[3] Cross, p. 270. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 269.

joy; but few authors, I suppose, who have had a real success, have known less of the flush and the sensation of triumph that are talked of as the accompaniments of success." And a little later to Mrs. Bray: "Buoyancy and exultation, I fancy, are out of the question when one has lived so long as I have. . . . I feel no regret that fame, as such, brings no pleasure; but it *is* a grief to me that I do not constantly feel strong in thankfulness that my past life has vindicated its uses, and given me reason for gladness that such an unpromising woman-child was born into the world."[1]

Yet, though she felt no pleasure in fame, as such, she had much satisfaction in knowing that the book was a good one—and was hers. She makes Adam look at his neat plans with gratification and pride, "for if Adam loved a bit of good work, he loved also to think 'I did it!' And I believe the only people who are free from that weakness are those who have no work to call their own."[2] But Adam was never tormented by the fear that his best work was already done. "Yes," she writes to Major Blackwood,[3] "I *am* assured now that *Adam Bede* was worth writing—worth living through long years to write. But now it seems impossible to me that I shall ever write anything so good and true again. I have arrived at faith in the past, but not at faith in the future." One reason for this fearfulness was, that she had such high ideals both in art and morals. She could never have been content to write a book that was only æsthetically beautiful; hence there was a great strain on her whole nature in all her writing. Yet her great aim could be expressed in a very few words: "The only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is, that those who read them should be better able to *imagine* and to *feel* the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures."[4]

[1] Cross, p. 281. [2] *Adam Bede*, chap. xxvii. [3] Cross, p. 274.
[4] Letter to Charles Bray, Cross, p. 279.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Some time after the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot wrote to Miss Elizabeth Phelps, who had asked her aid in the preparation of some lectures on her books: "*Apropos* of a distinction you seem to make between my earlier and later works—though I trust there is some growth in my appreciation of others and in my self-distrust—there has been no change in the point of view from which I regard our life since I wrote my first fiction, *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Any apparent change of spirit must be due to something of which I am unconscious. The principles which are at the root of my effort to paint Dinah Morris are equally at the root of my effort to paint Mordecai."[1] If this is so there is no reason for our going further into her life and work here. Many think it is not so; we divide her works into two groups—*Romola* marking the line of division—and it has been the custom to give nearly all our praise to the first group, finding many faults with the later one. Of the injustice of this I hope to write later on in this chapter. At present I wish only to point out that at any rate the point of view, spirit and principle are, as she says, much the same. There is still the sane, practical outlook, still the spirit of wide, sympathetic tolerance, the hope of improvement, the belief in the power and duty of one human soul to comfort, strengthen and inspire another. The same deep sincerity and strenuous moral earnestness underlie it all; the difference we find in the books is due to something less essential than these things.

By the time *Adam Bede* was written, the gradual change of feeling towards all religion, especially Christianity, was settled. When she went to London, she still cherished some antagonism towards the old faith. We have seen how time and the riper wisdom it brings, helped by the intimate acquaintance with Feuerbach, made it possible for her to include her old religion among the objects of her reverence.

Soon after the publication of *Adam Bede*, she reopened, by a letter, her friendship with M. D'Albert, who, ignorant of her changing thoughts, was so much astonished at the sympathy shown with religion in her books that he wondered if she had returned to Christianity. She replied that she had not returned to the acceptance of a set of doctrines as a creed, or to a belief in superhuman revelation, but that the spirit of antagonism which still possessed her in the long-past Geneva days had quite disappeared, and now she saw in Christianity "the highest

[1] *Harper's Magazine*, March, 1882.

expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind."[1] She prized it accordingly; revered its teaching—apart from the dogmas that have grown about it—and loved its poetry. She read much in the Bible, though Mr. Lewes did not share her affection for the book, and there are frequent reminiscences of biblical phrases scattered through her works.

"Many things that I should have argued against ten years ago," she writes in the same letter, "I now feel myself too ignorant, and too limited in moral sensibility, to speak of with confident disapprobation." Evidently the religious spirit had not died out in her, nor did she share in it only by sympathy. Indeed, her fuller recognition of the mystery about our lives[2] shows that the first incentive to worship was still alive in her, and the old forms, though worn, seemed still more beautiful and satisfying than any new ones. Religion, she believed, was a human necessity; she lost all fellow-feeling for Freethinkers as a class, because there grew up in her a "profound conviction of the efficacy that lies in all sincere faith, and the spiritual blight that comes with no-faith."[3] But it seemed to her that this was a time of transition. The old historical edifice of Christianity was discarded, and the spirit that had dwelt there —or been hidden there—needed a new home, for this spirit still appeared the highest the world had known in religion.

In a letter written to Madame Bodichon a year or two after the publication of *Adam Bede* she writes: "I have faith in the working out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other Church has presented; and those who have strength to wait and endure are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls—their intellect as well as their emotions—do not embrace with entire reverence."[4] This faith she kept to the end. It gleams here and there in *Daniel Deronda* and is more explicitly stated in her letters. In one to Mrs. H. B. Stowe she says: "I believe that religion, too, has to be modified—'developed,' according to the dominant phrase—and that a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent must express less care for personal consolation, and a more deeply awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot."[5]

The form of religion in which she could participate with her whole heart and intellect was not yet developed, but she had faith that it would be, and rejoiced in the prospect of it for the sake of coming generations.

Meanwhile, one important part of the teaching of Christ, as well as of all the greatest philosophers, she took as the centre

[1] Cross, p. 298. [2] See below, p. 167. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 356.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 330. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 447.

of her life—the duty and necessity and privilege of loving one's neighbour. Probably no one, Christian or philosopher, has ever loved and sympathised with individual fellow-creatures more passionately than she. And the love was not visionary, but practical. Gradually all else in religion and philosophy made way in her for this regard to practical good. What could contribute nothing to the benefit of struggling humanity was put aside with weary distaste, or, at least, lack of interest. In some degree she still adhered to the philosophy she had received in the Coventry days, though the "dreams of a Pantheistic sort" in which she had dwelt under the influence of Mr. Bray and Spinoza were fast becoming things of the past. Abstract truth was less to her, and the suffering, rejoicing individual more. It is fortunate that in her letters about this time there are several indications of the trend of her mind. In one of them, written to Mr. Bray in November, 1857, she says: "In the fundamental doctrine of your book (*The Philosophy of Necessity*)—that mind presents itself under the same conditions of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena. . . . I think you know that I agree. . . . I dislike extremely a passage in which you appear to consider the disregard of individuals as a lofty condition of mind. My own experience and development deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degree in which we sympathise with individual suffering and individual joy. The fact that in the scheme of things we see a constant and tremendous sacrifice of individuals is, it seems to me, only one of the many proofs that urge upon us our total inability to find in our own natures a key to the Divine mystery. I could more readily turn Christian and worship Jesus again than embrace a theism which professes to explain the proceedings of God. But I don't feel at all wise in these matters. I have a few strong impressions which serve me for my own support and guidance, but do not in the least qualify me to speak as a theorist."[1]

It seemed now that Science had no more to offer her; it could not penetrate deep enough into the mysteries of life. Though she wished well to workers on the extremest verge of knowledge, she always turned back with satisfaction to the idea that our chief business in the world is to better our race, and not only the race in a mass, but the separate individuals in it. So of Darwin's *Origin of Species* she writes: "To me the development theory and all explanations of processes by which things came to be produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes."[2]

And again: "I feel every day a greater disinclination for theories and arguments about the origin of things in the

[1] Cross, p. 231. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 296.

presence of all this mystery and beauty and pain and ugliness that floods one with conflicting emotions."[1]

Evidently neither science nor philosophy could fully satisfy her, nor could any existing form of religion. Perhaps Comte came nearer filling the blank than any other teacher or system. She could not fully accept his philosophy, nor join in his form of the religion of humanity,[2] but much of his teaching was acceptable to her, was indeed a clarification or strengthening of ideas and opinions already held or grasped at by her.

Her acquaintance with Comte's writings began at least as far back as her connection with the *Westminster Review*. A mention of him in her article on Lecky may or may not imply that she had already begun to read his works, but it is certain that she read his *General View of Positivism* and talked it over with Spencer in those early London days.[3] Yet there is no note of enthusiasm about his teaching—his name is rarely mentioned—before 1859 (the year of the publication of *Adam Bede*).

Some effect, of course, even the *General View* alone must have had on so sensitive a mind, and many may see Comte's ideas reflected in her first two books, in her recognition of the subjection of man to inexorable law, in her large social sympathy, in her respect for the capable workman, in Adam's recognition of the claims and needs of posterity, his satisfaction with the class to which he belongs, his reflections on the importance of feeling, and so on. But all these things were acknowledged by her in earlier days, or may have been the outcome of natural tendencies.

In 1859, however, she and Mr. Lewes removed to Wandsworth, where they had as near neighbours Mr. and Mrs. Richard Congreve, who were ardent Positivists. This acquaintance gave an impetus to her interest in Comte. In a few months we find her reading his *Catechism*. A re-reading of the *General View* in 1863 first roused in her a real enthusiasm for his work, and from that time there is increasingly frequent mention of the study of his books. This remained a favourite throughout her life, though her respect and admiration extended to all his writings. She writes in 1867 of her gratitude continually increasing for all the illumination he had contributed to her life. Still, he did not become an absolute guide to her. There were some parts of his teaching with which she could not agree. She had no faith in the possibility of his reconstruction of society, and regarded his *Politique Positive*, so far as it was limited to this, simply as a new and beautiful Utopia. Indeed, she knew well the impossibility of changing the world so in a few generations. She saw that change is very slow or very

[1] Cross, p. 225.
[2] She subscribed to the Positivist Church, but would not join it.
[3] Herbert Spencer i., 398, and ii., 364; see also p. 78.

uncertain, but she had faith in a gradual improvement of the mass, to be brought about, she believed, by greater sympathy of each with each.

Her later works certainly show a closer acquaintance with his writings, and her growing reverence for ties of all kinds, of duty, family, or race, is often attributed to his influence. Dr. Congreve called her poem, *The Spanish Gypsy*, "a mass of Positivism," chiefly because the ties of race there take the place of highest duty.

Probably, too, Comte has something to do with the definitely expressed aspirations after a more impersonal life which come later.[1] But whatever she owed to Comte, he never became sole or absolute guide of her life; her adherence was, as Mr. Cross says, "a limited adherence."[2]

One can hardly quit the subject of George Eliot's religious and philosophical views without quoting that well-known passage in Mr. Myers' essay[3] on her, a somewhat rhetorical passage, but imposing, and deeply felt: "I remember how at Cambridge I walked with her once in the Fellows' Garden of Trinity on an evening of rainy May; and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-calls of men—the words *God*, *Immortality*, *Duty*—pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbelievable was the *second*, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, had sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing law. I listened, and night fell; her grave, majestic countenance turned toward me like a Sibyl's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fates."

For herself, she took the third scroll with grave content, and spent none of her strength in repining over the other two.

Naturally, her devotion to duty, her recognition of the importance of our mutual help—especially since we may look nowhere for assistance except to one another—made her take her work with intense seriousness. That in this only lay her immortality was a small matter; she learned not to prize even *this* immortality for her own sake, as she realised "how entirely the rewards of the artist lie apart from everything that is narrow and personal."

Later, she enshrined this thought in her poem of *Jubal*, who, having given the divine gift of music to man, and travelled over the world to spread this gladness, comes back to his old home to see temples raised and festivals held in his honour,

[1] See a letter to Mrs. R. Lytton written in 1870 (Cross, p. 461).
[2] Cross, p. 620. [3] *Century Magazine*, Nov., 1881.

and to be refused recognition and beaten away with his worshippers' flutes. The "angel of his life and death" comes to him as he lies dying, "a lonely pain," and bids him rejoice in the thought of the great gift he has given to the world.

> "Thy limbs shall lie dark, tombless on this sod,
> Because thou shinest in man's soul, a god,
> Who found and gave new passion and new joy
> That nought but Earth's destruction can destroy.
> Thy gifts to give was thine of men alone;
> 'Twas but in giving that thou couldst atone
> For too much wealth amid their poverty."

It was her very self, the best part of herself, even as it was Jubal's yearning and delight, that she gave. "My books are deeply serious to me," she writes to M. D'Albert,[1] "and come out of all the painful discipline, all the most-hardly-learnt lessons of my life"; and again to Miss Hennell: "They are written out of my deepest belief, and as well as I can, for the great public."[2] Yet she did not forget that she was not a preacher but an artist. It was after the publication of *Daniel Deronda* that she wrote to Mrs. Peter Taylor: "My function is that of the *æsthetic*, not the doctrinal teacher—the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge."[3]

She avoided not only the advocation of measures but of opinions and theories, except those deep, strong beliefs that had become vital to her.

Others have wondered that she has given us, among all her noble characters, no picture of a soul holding modern ideas, free from the old dogmas—a character like Shelley or Spinoza; yet, though she has not done so, the spirit of modern philosophy, ennobled and made free, like poetry which gives us the higher truth, purified from accidents, breathes through all her work. Tenderly and beautifully as she always treated Christianity, one cannot differ from her in what she herself says about the message of her writings in a letter to Hon. Mrs. Ponsonby: "My books have for their main bearing a conclusion . . . without which I could not have cared to write any representation of human life—namely, that the fellowship between man and man, which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent on conceptions of what is not man; and that the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of a goodness entirely human (*i.e.*, an exaltation of the human)."[4]

In her most exalted pictures of the redeeming power exercised by one soul over another—the most extreme representation of the capability of human fellowship—this

[1] Cross, p. 290. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 338. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 574. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 532.

conclusion is still evident. Though in her earlier books this power is exerted through the medium of Christianity, though Mr. Tryan appears to save Janet by divine teaching and Dinah to win Hetty by her holy love, yet, in truth, it was the deep, pitying, loving sympathy in each case that won the victory. Daniel Deronda needed no revealed religion in his difficult task of upraising Gwendolen. There we see more closely the power of human fellowship. From her first work to her last there sounds that strong, stern acknowledgment of, and submission to, those laws which limit and govern human beings no less absolutely than beasts and inanimate things are limited and governed—laws which it is not in our power to break, but which we sometimes, through ignorance or wilfulness, fail to take into our reckoning, bringing upon ourselves automatically the unerring, impersonal, passionless punishment of our folly. In connection with this, there is one lesson which she strove to teach over and over again in her strongest words, that is, the absolute impossibility of destroying our deeds. "Our deeds are like children that are born to us; they live and act apart from our will. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never; they have an indestructible life both in and out of our consciousness."

In all her books one is impressed by the deep respect for the sacredness of ties. It is, perhaps, Maggie who, in her strenuous struggle and keen pain, expresses this in the simplest, most powerful words, but they are echoed again and again by Romola, Dorothea, Deronda and others: "If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment." "It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feelings; but, then, such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us—the ties that have made others dependent on us—and would cut them in two. . . . Many things are difficult and dark to me; but I see one thing quite clearly—that I must not, cannot seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused. Our love would be poisoned. Don't urge me, help me—help me *because* I love you."[1]

These ties she helps to make sacred by the submission of her noblest characters to them—a submission which is often accompanied by severest agony. They are real ties, however—ties of blood, of relation, of birth, of duty, never dead or artificial bonds; the violation of these means suffering and injustice to some fellow-creature or the debasing of one's own

[1] *The Mill on the Floss*, Book VI., chap. xi.

nature. She sees with pity rather than admiration a soul wronging itself for the sake of traditions which have become lifeless, yet she recognises the power of these traditions. In some of her later work, *e.g.*, in *Spanish Gipsy* and *Deronda*, it is not only family ties and the obligations of a small society which bind her characters. Fedalma goes out a sad and hopeless but nobly submissive sacrifice to her doomed race. Daniel gives himself to a somewhat dim hope of bettering his people with the glad, unselfish zeal of a prophet. It is the same teaching but on a larger scale.

There is little need to speak of her high ethical standard. This has never been disputed; indeed, its very height and severity have been used by those whose observance of traditional morality could not endure any exceptions, as evidence against her conscientious upholding of that one act in her life which was a mutiny against social rules. Generally, her lessons apply to ordinary life; it was the commonplace man and woman she longed to help and gladden; she did not write for the few and the elect, but for those who are walking along the ordinary paths, and especially for those who are finding the journey difficult and disheartening. Hence the teaching, though high, is, as a rule, simple. Mr. Myers truly says: "For the lessons most imperatively needed by the mass of men—the lessons of deliberate kindness, of careful truth, of unwavering endeavour—for these plain themes one could not ask a more convincing teacher."

Since it was the human mind that interested her above all things else, one is not surprised when Lord Morley tells us that she once said "that she began with moods, thoughts, passions, and then invented the story for their sake, and fitted it to them."[1] There is plentiful evidence of this in her books. Lord Morley proceeds, however: "Shakspere, on the other hand, picked up a story that struck him, and then proceeded to work in the moods, thoughts and passions as they came to him in the course of meditation on the story. We hardly need the result to convince us that Shakspere chose the better part." But how did a story come to strike Shakspere? Was it not by its very possibilities of these that it attracted him? I do not think he wove these in as they came to him afterwards. The story was chosen for their sakes above everything else, and they were his first care. If the story mattered so much to him we should not have those hurried windings-up, with their astonishing mis-matings, which startle us more than once in his work. I am not, of course, desiring to place George Eliot on the throne beside Shakspere, but I think that in this very point there is a likeness between them rather than a difference.

It is in delineation of character and human emotion that

[1] *Miscellanies*, "Life of George Eliot."

George Eliot most deserves to be compared with him, though her method is a different one and her range of character and emotion, large as it is, and including some human relations and feelings on which he has not touched, is less varied. She is not brilliant in invention of incidents, and one characteristic result of this is that often the whole plot is carried on a stage by means of some spiritual experience which was roused by the very slightest outward cause, as in the case of Maggie shaping her life for years by the help of an *Imitation of Christ* that came to her in a very simple, unobtrusive manner.

The wonderful acuteness and infinite sympathy which could produce such startingly convincing studies of inmost experience is possessed by no other novelist to the same extent; indeed, in dealing with the human conscience, Shakspere himself scarcely surpasses her. In all literature there is no more subtle analysis of the gradual death of conscience and decay of character than her great creation, Tito, and where could one find the long, dreary, wretched struggles of a conscience that refused to die more faithfully pictured than in the experience of Bulstrode? M. Scherer rightly says that "Hers is the novel of moral analysis. There is her speciality, there her triumph."[1] It was natural that with such power she should care most to give us studies of characters with some flaw in them, characters in which she would have an opportunity of presenting the intense sufferings and noble straining of an acute conscience. Maggie and Gwendolen are, I think, the finest examples of this insight. But one might think that she loved imperfection for itself—æsthetically, of course—when one reads of her pity for those who shall live when mankind is perfected, and who

> "Will not know half the dear imperfect things
> That move my smiles and tears—will never know
> The fine old incongruities that raise
> My friendly laugh; the innocent conceits
> That, like a needless eye-glass or black patch,
> Give those who wear them harmless happiness;
> The twists and cracks in our poor earthenware
> That touch me to more conscious fellowship
> (I am not myself the finest Parian)
> With my coevals."[2]

[1] *Essays on English Literature*, translated by Professor Saintsbury: On Daniel Deronda, p. 49.

[2] *A Minor Prophet.* Professor Saintsbury, while recognising the tender humour evidently possessed by the writer of the above lines, finds in her "an insufficient devotion to the great god Nonsense," and certainly that divinity is scarcely divine to her. Yet nonsense would not have harmonised well with her other qualities, and I, for one, am not inclined to lament its absence. A fine comic genius, like Meredith, may delight in picturing a fool: he may even make him the instrument of a tragedy, but to a nature whose basis was orderly, law-abiding moral gravity, this was as impossible as it would have been to write one of Mr. Hardy's soul-appalling tragedies of fate or chance. It is always some fault or sin that brings down calamity in her books, though with stern adherence to truth she makes the calamity fall on innocent, as well as on guilty.

Most of George Eliot's work is that of a thorough realist, with scarcely more than the least possible admixture of idealism. "Art is the nearest thing to life," she says, and she rigidly excludes from her books anything that will make them unlike life. Not only so, but she includes much that the art of her day, and even of ours, finds rather difficult to admit. This, too, in her own special sphere of human relations. I think it is a lingering regard for the old poetic justice, reluctantly resigned as regards "endings," but not yet banished altogether, that has made some critics, as well as ordinary readers, cry out against Maggie's love for Stephen, Dorothea's failure to find an epic life and so on. Sir Leslie Stephen also finds Janet "so charming as to make her subjection to the snuffy, brandy-smelling, wife-beating bully a little too repulsive." But George Eliot knew that such things are, and to quail before these unpalatable truths, to shirk them or represent them in a less disagreeable form, would have seemed to her like cowardice or untruthfulness.

It is just the extremity of the situation which appeals to her. Many able critics, including Mr. R. H. Hutton and Sir Leslie Stephen, have been unable to accept Maggie's fascination. As a rule, they do not even admit that it may be true that such a girl could love such a man. They are not surprised at Adam's love for shallow-souled Hetty, because it is more openly acknowledged that men are susceptible to beauty than that women are attracted by courtesy. Think of Maggie, with her narrow life and its few acquaintances, mostly uncultured people; think of her intense love for the bright and beautiful, the weary, young years of starvation, the great wealth of passionate love that longed to be poured out; then imagine the appearance of a young man, well-looking, educated, possessed of the power of song, evidently unable to resist her attraction, more than all, of courteous and gentle manners. A girl of Maggie's nature, with a noble, impulsive soul, prone to error, yet ardently desiring good, meeting for almost the first time with the evident homage of a "gentleman," may easily respond too readily to the attraction. Besides, her full nature was just ripe, and she needed an object to love. And Maggie was still young. Large, generous, womanly souls often fall into the error of a foolish early love, some far more foolish than this, for sometimes they waste themselves on a nature not only insignificant, but mean and selfish. Meredith's Sandra,[1] in her love for Wilfrid Pole, was even less wise than Maggie, for Pole was calculating and careful of compromising himself, even to signing his letters "Your lover," and trying to hinder Sandra's best development for the gratification of his selfish passion.

[1] *Sandra Belloni.*

Stephen was at least ready to let everything else go for Maggie's love, and she was not likely to care much about his undistinguished mind where there was a wealth of devotion ready to be lavished on her. Probably, had Maggie lived, she would have outgrown this love as Sandra hers, but she did not. Those who object to this love-affair call Stephen a fop, a "mere hairdresser's block," though I think most readers see in him simply a commonplace man; they say that the incident throws a disagreeable light on Maggie's character. If she had succumbed to the temptation this would be quite true; but, as it is, the light is by no means disagreeable; Maggie is higher in our estimation at the end of her trial than before the beginning. If there is any fault at all, it is that the fresh light—surely we may continue to receive light to the end—has come just a little too suddenly. George Eliot confessed that she had felt obliged to compress the last volume more than she wished because of the "Epische Breite" of the first two. The ordinary reader needed a little more preparation for the reception of this love as well as for the catastrophe. To me, there is nothing in Maggie's infatuation contradictory to what we already know of her.

The case of Dorothea is still more to the point in this matter of close adherence to life. In her story we see "a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur, ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity." Her creator saw only too clearly the sadness of the lot of a Saint Theresa born into this modern world. True, many Theresas have perished and sunk unwept into oblivion in the old days, but that does not make the experience less painful to-day. Melancholy as is the effect of the book, with all its pictures of failures and mistakes, we know that it is no exaggeration. Just so must a modern Theresa stumble and suffer, and though idealists seeking and failing to find a suitable element in the world may be few, it is well that we should have an artistic representation of their experience. Idealists and Theresas, too, are our fellows, and need our sympathy as much as the commonplace man and woman, though they less often come in our way, and since we can never see the world simply as it is, but must always behold it through the medium of our own personality or another's, it will only widen our knowledge, not give us false views, if we see it also through the eyes of a "foundress of nothing."

Middlemarch would have fallen better into line with other works of art on related subjects if there had been a gradual working-up to a tragic situation, and then—death. It would have given a more distinct feeling of finish if George Eliot had allowed Dorothea to find an epic death, so that readers might lose the uneasiness born of the perception that her

aspiring soul could find no epic life; but she was bent on making the sense of waste and incoherence strongly felt; she would not add, for the comfort of those who helped to make the environment of such natures so difficult, a conclusion which she knew was far from being the usual one.[1]

To George Eliot it was a painful fact that such natures seldom find the "living stream," but she did not attempt to show any remedy for this evil; one can scarcely discern even the dim hope that fuller knowledge of each other may make it less.

It is true that while George Eliot's early books are clear and powerful, and in a high sense simple, her later ones, including her poetry, take a larger canvas or a more unusual subject, are more complex and require a greater mental effort to appreciate. I have said that the essential spirit is the same, but its manifestation is certainly somewhat different. Truths that she once accepted in their simplest form had now appeared to her in the more exact and formal presentation of a philosophy, and what had once appealed to the emotions now made its appeal to the intellect also. There is a greater amount of attention paid to ideas in these later books, and an increased anxiety to be quite exact and truthful. This produces sometimes a feeling of laboriousness. The increased complexity of character also leads to minute details of exposition. But the greatest lack is the absence of that fresh delight in loving remembrance of other scenes and days which forms one of the chief charms of her early work. Perhaps, too, there is some truth in the objection that she wrote of a real world in those books, one in which she had really lived and taken part, and in her later ones, especially *Daniel Deronda*, of one in which she walked almost as a stranger, never coming to close grips with its actualities. Yet, when all is said, these later books have a value of their own which quite makes up for what we miss in them. The increased force and penetration, the extended power of representing the subtlest workings of minds very unlike her own, such as Rosamund and Bulstrode, give a deepened interest to her work. Indeed, as regards her own particular gift of varied psychological analysis, *Middlemarch* is probably her greatest work, though I think in no book has she excelled the wonderful portrait of Gwendolen.

Professor Dowden has made an excellent defence of *Daniel Deronda*, in which he declares that we need to approach it as we approach certain frescoes of Italian masters, certain sym-

[1] Sir Leslie Stephen regrets that Dorothea did not "find satisfaction, like other young ladies, in looking after schools and the unhealthy cottages on her uncle's estate," and consoles himself on the happy failure of her marriage with Ladislaw, by thinking that she had just a slight touch of stupidity.

phonies of German musicians—with a mind prepared. In this book, he says, "for the first time the poetical side of George Eliot's genius obtains adequate expression."[1] Even when he wrote, in 1877, there were those who found Deronda himself detestable,[2] and thought the book a lamentable falling-off. To a mind *not* prepared there is much of dulness in this novel. The idealism which was restrained with saddened realism in *Middlemarch* is now given freer play. We see the idealist, Mordecai, with his visions fulfilled, his longings gratified, and we, not being idealists, rather resent such attention being given to him. He bores us by his rhapsodies, his yearnings, and his bright faith in the future of a race, the rallying power of which we still disbelieve in. We get a little tired of his visionary talk, we weary of him and Deronda, and long to get back to Gwendolen. Why is this? Is it not because we rather resent the presence of the idealist outside an epic poem? Jews say that the Jewish part of the book is finely done, but we prefer the other. We like our idealists presented either in a reassuring and *conquering* atmosphere of realism or in visionary clouds; we are alarmed when they come in touch with our life and do not succumb to its influences; we feel uneasy at the thought of them walking our streets and leaning on a London bridge looking for a prophet coming down the Thames in the golden glory of the setting sun. This is really what is the matter with *Daniel Deronda*. It needs a different attitude of mind from that with which we usually approach her work, for here she has indulged a part of her nature with which we are not well acquainted, and has not only shown us the sadness of the usual lot of the idealist, but has pleased herself by gratifying his longings, fulfilling his visions, though still, true to her chief conviction, making all his hope centre in impersonal good.

The uniting of a second story is less happy than the twisting of several threads in *Middlemarch*, because the plan of the later book did not need wide glances over a whole community, and because the two stories are much more dissimilar in spirit than those of the former novel. Perhaps the object was to show Deronda as priest as well as prophet; as devoted to the need of a single, faulty soul as well as to the larger, more general work for humanity, as caring for the individual as well as the nation. This care for the nation and the effort to portray glowing devotion to it belongs to her distinctly Positivist days. She never lived close to national enthusiasm; it is a philosophical interest, not bound up with her own joys and

[1] *Studies in Literature*, "George Eliot." C. E. Francillon wrote an essay on *Daniel Deronda* for the *Gentleman's Magazine* (N.S. 17, 411) under the heading "George Eliot's First Romance."

[2] R. L. Stevenson writes, in December, 1877, of "that melancholy puppy and humbug, Daniel Deronda, the Prince of Prigs, the literary abomination of desolation in the way of manhood." Letters I., 123.

sorrows. In the earlier years, which have been our concern, she extended her loving embrace from the individual to the family, from the family to humanity. The interpolation of race always strikes one in her as something thrust in; one feels the difference of origin. Though Comte would have the nations closely bound in fellowship, he still recognises their individuality—and gives France the highest place; and he feels strongly the difference between the Western and the Eastern world. It was probably under his influence that George Eliot made another step in her ascent from the individual to humanity.

I have touched on these points in the hope that I might give some idea of the differences and resemblances between George Eliot when we leave her in 1859 and the George Eliot who was a chief centre of literary interest through the Seventies. I cannot end my work without saying something about her relation to her age and to ours.

There were two important groups of writers in her day—the intellectual group and the Pre-Raphaelites. To the first, who joined a strong regard for intellect with their art, and who recognised and valued the scientific thought of the day, George Eliot naturally belongs. She is akin to Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle and Matthew Arnold, in spite of—nay, because of—the difference in the religious and philosophical views of these great men. But in her determination to paint life as she saw it, and not according to any received methods, in her faithfulness and realism she is connected also with the original motives of the Pre-Raphaelites.[1] She belonged essentially, however, to her time, and to the spirit of progress which marked it so strongly. Her fellow-feeling for all with whom she came in contact, and even for those of whom she only heard, was intense. The same life that was in them was in her; she shared to the full and shared *involuntarily* the joys and pain of her fellows. Sympathy was not an effort; the greater part of her nature was a true *feeling with* her kind, not a divinely condescending pity; it was not only duty and goodness that brought out this feeling; it was a vital connection between her and others, especially those others who were of their age and for it. This made her share not only the gladness and suffering both of individuals and masses, but also the thought of the day. With her it could not have been otherwise; as soon as she came in touch with this living movement she was compelled to join it. This close connection brought about its

[1] There is, of course, little resemblance on the surface between her work and that of the Pre-Raphaelite poets, though there is some similarity between the spirit of her work and that of Holman Hunt's. Pre-Raphaelite poetry is much less in harmony with the age in its entirety than are George Eliot's books.

results as inevitably as the blood of the Zincali in Fedalma. It was because of it that, instead of marching along as a leader of her generation, she walked in their midst and ministered to them, and drew them quietly along with her. That is why she was so readily recognised by her contemporaries. She was *of* them; she spoke their thoughts and expressed their feelings, clothing them in new meaning and beauty. She belonged to her age as Shakspere to his, and, like him, was gladly recognised.

Some theological writers, Mr. R. H. Hutton among them, point to her sadness as a result of her participation in the religious doubts of her day, but I do not think her opinions had anything to do with it. Gravity was natural to her. In the letters written in her girlhood there is little of joy or hopefulness. Though susceptible to the "pure enjoyment of comicality" and often indulging in laughter, a deep seriousness of moral responsibility, perhaps more intense than any other artist has ever experienced, prevented a brighter, merrier view of life. Yet she was pained when told that many readers found her books profoundly sad. She wanted them to make people happy, yet she must describe life as she found it, and it did not appear to her as made up chiefly of gladness.

"Life," says she, "though a good to men on the whole, is a doubtful good to many, and to some not a good at all. To my thought, it is a source of constant mental distortion to make the denial of this a part of religion—to go on pretending things are better than they are. To me early death takes the aspect of salvation; though I feel, too, that those who live and suffer may sometimes have the greater blessedness of *being* a salvation."[1]

She could not set her mind simply on the general good; she suffered with the unfortunate individual, and she was probably scarcely aware how her heart was drawn to the unhappy, like Dinah's to Snowfield, so that she gave them more than a proportionate share of attention.

Passages can be found in her writings to show that she loved life, and quotations from her speech have been given to show that she considered it an injury to have been born. The latter are probably the result of fits of despondency, as bright, glad words in her letters are sometimes the reflection of the sunshine of early summer. As she herself declared, at a moment when she was neither exalted nor depressed, "I will not answer to the name of optimist, but if you like to invent 'meliorist' I will not say you call me out of my name."[2] For though she found the world sad enough, she believed that a great many existing evils could be remedied, and would be so, but slowly.

[1] To Mrs. Bray, Cross, p. 384.
[2] Miss E. Simcox in *Nineteenth Century Review*, May, 1881.

It is strange to think that, when she began to write, Dickens and Thackeray were at the height of their fame, and that she reviewed Meredith's *Shaving of Shagpat* before ever she wrote a story. How much nearer she seems than the two first, and how surprising it is that she should have sprung to the highest point of renown, have finished her work and died, before Meredith gained anything like just recognition. She is far more akin to Meredith than to her famous precursors, especially in her wide, human, *understanding* sympathy, and her mental attitude to life. Her almost unerring psychology contrasts strongly with the fantastical characterisation of Dickens, and her deep tenderness with the more external interest of Thackeray, though there are, of course, many points which she has in common with one or the other of them. But Meredith is, like her, strong in the knowledge of humanity; he extends to all men as kindly a tolerance as she herself does, though we do not feel the tenderness so much. Like her, he has put aside the dogmas of Christianity, but he represents a farther stage in the development of a new spirit of religion. For her there was little but a hope for the good progress of humanity; for him a gladness in his connection with Earth. She grieved over those for whom life has no good, and saw no sure consolation for them; he had a strong faith in the goodness at the heart of things, and could worship Earth even in her terrible aspects, when she plucked one and another from the feast and deigned no justification of her actions. Her "brave despair" has been spoken of, but this was not her usual attitude. She had a hope in the widening of the skirts of good, a hope, strenuously held, not so bright and strong as Meredith's, grasped in keen pain, but grasped firmly and calmly. All in her philosophy of life is grey light, pure and free from mist, with no stormy clouds and no brilliant sunshine.

Great is still her power among us, and if those of other countries sometimes find her books too heavily loaded with moral teachings and reflections, that makes her no less loved here in England, where, in spite of critics and philosophers, readers are little inclined to separate art and goodness. Indeed, it wins her a larger audience, an audience of the kind she most wished to address—one made up of men and women who find life serious and earnest, if not painful, and who go to her for a strong, helpful word.

Even among the smaller number, who never go to literature for help in living, but only for intellectual pleasure, the attraction of her strong personality and fine artistic gifts is powerful to draw an audience. Rarely has her own exquisite humour been surpassed, seldom has her soul-moving pathos been equalled, and her dramatic skill makes her books full of absorbing interest.

But beyond everything else, her wonderful insight into the most usual as well as the most rare and hidden motives and emotions of the human soul, her perfect representation of the struggles, failures and victories of the conscience--these, brooded over by her great, loving sympathy, seem to spread tender, understanding fellowship as the sun spreads light, and to give power of vision, joyful with fresh love, to all who come within her influence.

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